

Political Participation and Nigerian Democracy: A Survey of the Electorate in the 2012 Governorship Election in Edo State

Ikponmwosa Ebomoyi

Department of Political Science, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria

Omoredede Christiana Kayinwaye, Ph.D

Dept of Public Administration, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria

Abstract

This paper explores Nigerians' political participation in Nigeria's democracy. It situates the core indices frustrating the emergence of an effective democratic culture within the context of domestic instability and crisis. The paper adopted both primary and secondary sources in collecting data. Whilst, employing both ethnicity and Elite theories to further buttress the focus of this paper, political issues in Nigeria therefore, were discovered to be driven by the "moneyed-class" while the majority of the masses feel alienated. Also discovered is that access to the political space is a function of wealth. Electoral violence was also discovered as a core variable militating against effective political participation. The paper concludes that there is the need to reform the electorate system in Nigeria if Nigeria is to escape from the present atrocious political situation, political parties in addition, must be able to observe internal democracy within their ranks and also there should be periodic public sensitization, while elections must also be credible. The paper recommends among others; that political parties members must have opportunity to make input into the decision making process in this respect, the overwhelming influence of the rich and powerful Godfathers will be reduced to the barest minimum. As a logical follow up to the above, there should be a conscious attempt at reducing illiteracy among majority of Nigerians. This will enable citizens to be aware of their civil rights and responsibilities and finally among others, sustainable effort at economic empowerment of the people must also be guaranteed. This will certainly serve as an antidote to vote buying. It is therefore, also, important that the government meet the basic economic needs of its citizens to forestall the regular occurrence of these perverted tendencies

Keywords: Politics, Political Participation, Democracy, Election and Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

A nation's democratic credentials are enhanced by the extent to which ordinary citizens take active part in politics. The people's involvement in the political processes bring about a psychological nexus between them and public policies churned out by political leaders, and inevitably makes them want to defend and fight on behalf of the state. Indeed, it is an injustice to prevent an individual from airing his/her voice in matters in which he/she has interests. Political participation is a legitimizing mechanism and an educating tool which enhances both the meaning of the people's lives and the value of their relationship with each other (McLean, 1996:362).

In the context of Nigerian democracy, political participation has often been a contentious one. Oyovbaire (1989) suggested that the frequent military interventions, with its authoritarian dimension have reduced enthusiasm towards political participation. Beyond military intervention, the character of the Nigerian state itself is also responsible for the perceived low levels of political participation in much of the post-colonial history of the state. Elite factions have often built support constituencies from communal, ethnic, religious and regional groups to manipulate and exploit the differences and anxieties arising from unequal size and population to advance their interests at the expense of the masses (Osaghae, 2002:25). However, this is not to down play or belittle the significance of peasant-based state-challenging struggles such as the upheavals that preceded the infamous annulment of the June 12 elections of 1993. Yet the point to note is that Nigeria's political elite, which Dudley (1982:28) has defined as 'the rich and powerful', have often succeeded in politically socializing the average citizen by employing ethnic and other primordial sentiments, such that the citizen refrains from using rationality to scrutinize decisions during elections. Powerful ethno-regional elite blocs have emerged at different points in history to forge constitutive interests in political competition with others. In the 1950s, there were groups like Egbe Omo Oduduwa and the jamiyyar Mutanen Arewa. At present, we have ethno- regional elite blocs like the Arewa consultative forum (ACF), Afenifere and Ohaneze Ndigbo. These groups' activities have serious implication for political participation of the ordinary citizen.

This paper is focused on electoral violence of Nigeria's political participation. Onwudiere and Berwind (2010) argued that electoral violence has prevented the emergence of a moral and ethical political leadership in Nigeria. They further contend that electoral and political violence in general; have been seen to have put off a lot of decent citizens away from politics. It is a general knowledge that most of those who enjoy political power in

Nigeria today can hardly reproduce their privileges and wealth outside the state. This seems to explain the desperation and opportunism with which political power is sought and used, and also accounts for the violence which accompany elections in Nigeria. As Ake (1985:5) wrote 'power is everything and those who control the coercive resources use it freely to promote their interests, including the appropriation of surpluses. This situation has the direct effect of excluding certain citizens who may ordinarily want to assist in nation-building and good governance.

Political participation cannot also be discussed without making allusion to financial resources. Beyond the ordinary voter perspective, those who intend to contest elective positions must have relative financial clout. This is because the political process in Nigeria's democracy is heavily monetized and those who seek elective positions must, according to Ebohon and Obakhedo (2010:160) search for a god-father or more appropriately in the universal context, a patron. They further contend that Without the existence of a god father, who nurtures the prospective candidate, and ensures that party machinery and the entire political process does not connive to swindle his protégé, political participation at the level of electoral contest may simply be an illusion.

Nigeria's democracy, after about twenty years must move beyond the confines of a fledgling democracy. Increased political participation is a key factor for democratic advancement. If Nigeria's democracy is to be consolidated, broadened and deepened, the state must move to rectify certain anomalies that continue to frustrate active political participation by the generality of the citizenry. Political participation within Nigeria's democracy therefore is the fundamental inquiry of this paper. Our central focus is the 2012 governorship election in Edo State, with Adams Oshiomhole of the then Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) and General Charles Ahriavbere (Rtd) of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) as the major candidates. A fundamental issue of Nigeria's democracy is associated with the participation of majority of the citizenry in the political process. As for the ordinary voter, there has often been the perception of their opinion counting for little; since the electoral process is often fraught with irregularities such as ballot stuffing and the outright stealing or destruction of electoral materials. This has often led to voters' apathy. The citizenry also sometimes, refuse to participate in political processes due to frequent cases of electoral violence. Indeed, elections in Nigeria have often been punctuated by violence at both the level of party primaries, and the main elections.

For citizens seeking elective positions, certain factors have been perceived to constitute impediments to their wishes and aspirations. Firstly, it is assumed that they are often frustrated by the fact that those who are incumbents use the coercive resources of the state to prosecute elections to the detriment of those outside government. Again, those seeking elective positions, in Nigeria, as elsewhere, may not have the financial and political clout to engage in the electoral process. The history of political patrons (God fathers) in Nigeria shows that, rather than being a partner in political and economic development, they have in the main been a disruptive and parasitic class, (Osaghae, 2002:45).

In the light of the above, the following questions are raised. Do Nigerians effectively participate in the political process? Did the 2012 gubernatorial elections in Edo state conform within the ambit of the international best practices? Does the average Edo voter have confidence in the electoral process? Can the rich and the powerful manipulate electoral process? Can we truly say that Edo State is governed democratically? In answering these questions, we adopted the survey research method. This design is a frequently used mode of observation of the Social Sciences. It has served as a major breakthrough in the field of Political Science (Anikpo, 1986). This design is to the Social Sciences as experimental design is to the physical and Biological Sciences. It has remained the hallmark of the behavioral revolution in the field of Political Science. In exploiting this research method, we limited our population of study which, Schutt (1999) defined as the sum or total of all the elements or units of analysis which a study is interested in, to the entire population of Edo State as reported in the 2006 census by the national population commission (Official Gazette, No 2, vol. 96). The 2006 projected population of Edo State was put at 3,218,332.

We chose the stratified random sampling technique, relying specifically on the purposive or judgmental sampling which according to Ogisi and Igun (2000), are ways of selecting sub-groups from the population on the basis of available information and data that can be judged to be representative of the entire population. The sample size that was used for the study is 1,800 respondents (one thousand eight hundred) taken from the 18 (eighteen) local government areas. 100 (one hundred) was taken from each local government areas, from which generalization was made at the end of the study. It must be noted that under a number of circumstances, the technique is appropriate because it lessens the possibility of inaccurate assessment. The choice of this sampling technique is informed by its value for adequate representativeness of the entire population (Aghayere, 2000; and Goode and Haff, 1952). In addition to primary sources of data, secondary sources, as differentiated by Mazi, (2006), was also used in this paper. The paper instrument used in gathering the primary research data is the questionnaire. The product of the primary data gathering exercise was analyzed using the simple percentage and variance regression analysis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Political participation within the general parameters of Nigerian democracy can be situated in the context of a deeply divided society (Osaghae, 2002). Politics in the country, especially contestation for state power and resources, have largely been organized around regional, ethnic and religious interests. As Graf (1988:13) argued, harmony, cooperation and unity have manifestly not characterized social and political life in post-independence Nigeria. No effective formula has been found to bring ethnic competition, class conflict and social diversity into a higher productive synthesis. The centrifugal pulls emanating from this pattern of politics has often made resolution of what Nigerian social scientists refer to as 'national question' difficult (Osaghae, 2002:15). All of this has had implications for political participation. In times of elections citizens often see realities from ethnic dimensions (Onwudiere and Berwind, 2010). Individuals normally see political engagements and elections as avenues for the advancements of ethnic and communal interests. There is less emphasis on the adoption of rationality and critical reasoning during periods of elections, public policy advocacy and political participation in general. Rather, majority of the citizens make recourse to primordial sentiments (Osaghae, 2002:21).

Yet some other writers opined that there are exceptions. Lewis (1994:326) argued that the election of June 12 1993 were free from the ethno-regional under currents that has become synonymous with political participation in Nigeria. Onwudiere and Berwind (2010) also assert that the governorship elections of 2007 in Edo State did not follow the logic of ethnic politics. They nevertheless argued that political party formation and configuration in the post-colonial Nigerian State has been largely erected on the basis of ethnic politics.

Existing literature on political participation within Nigeria's democracy also emphasize the dominance of the elite (Ake, 1985, Nnoli, 1993; Forrest, 1993; Idahosa, 2012). Power relations and competition for power constitute the core of political participation in Nigeria. Nnoli (1993) argues that because the Nigerian elites have the resources and where withal, they are at the forefront of the competition for power. This is not to suggest that the masses are not relevant, but rather to show that even peasant based mass struggles are often instigated and controlled by factions of the ruling classes (Ake, 1985).

The key to understanding political participation therefore lies in knowing the character of the elite which Dudley (1982:28) has simply referred to as 'the rich and the powerful'. Nigeria's elite which is factionalized along ethnic, regional, religious and institutional lines have been in the forefront of political party formation in much of the post-colonial era (Forrest, 1993). Elitist figures have also largely set the tone for political engagements. Osaghae (2002:26) isolates certain elite groups like the 'Kaduna Mafia', 'Ikenne axis' and the 'Langtang mafia' as powerful power blocs that structures political participation at the macro-level of Nigerian politics.

In Nigeria, elite dominance of political participation and the democratic process reaches their apotheosis with the idea of "godfatherism". Onwudiere and Berwind (2010) trace the origin of this political malaise to the activities of nationalist leaders like Obafemi Awolowo, Nnamdi Azikiwe and Ahmadu Bello. In the present era, Omodia (2005) argues that the activities of political godfathers like Lamidi Adedibu and the Uba brothers lead to the constriction of the political space. Ebohon and Obakhedo (2010) contented that this phenomenon detract from Nigeria's democratic credentials. There have also been extant views on the nature of political participation as it relates to the character of contestation for power. There is a consensus, here, that electoral process in Nigeria is crisis-prone, chaos threatened and violence-ridden. This is due to the fact that politicians see political offices as avenues for private material accumulation. As Graf (1988:108) explains in relation to the 1983 elections, the emergence of the NPN as a political behemoth led other party elites to see 'their chances for access to patronage, clientelism and state office greatly diminish'. At this point, protests, violence, lawsuits and hence a process of de-legitimization set in Ake (1985:5) suggests that violence during elections is due to the fact that in Nigeria 'power is everything' and those who control the coercive resources use it freely to promote their interests, including the appropriation of surplus.

Contestants, rather than peaceful engagement, struggle on bitterly; polarizing their differences, politics becomes a tool for alienation and distrust among political competitions. According to Omodia (2009) this easily explains why those who ought to be elder statesmen in the polity advocate for 'do or die' tactics during elections. This is in relation to the 2007 elections, when former president Obasanjo used unconventional methods to aid the ambition of his political party, the PDP.

When the democratic process and avenues for political participation become enmeshed in violence, some sections of the citizenry will develop apathy (Onwudiere and Berwind, 2010). In addition, Nigerians openly say that votes do not count in 'typical' elections. It is usually on this basis that many people stay away from elections which constitute the fundamental avenue for political participation. Osaghae (2002:21) believe that this is the result of the present situation in which the nation lack a national society governed by common moral, cultural, and behavioral norms. Citizens do not feel that they owe the state any duty or obligation. They viewed the state as an alien institution that does not deserve their support. In fact government business is often regarded as no man's business. Indeed, one of the most dangerous ailments of the Nigerian political process is that citizens do not act enough so as to enthrone accountability and transparency. The beginning point, according to Omodia

(2009) is to take part, not just in election but also in policy advocacy.

PARTICIPATION IN THE 2012 GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION IN EDO STATE

The data gathered using questionnaire from the field work are carefully presented in tabulated form below for proper analysis and interpretation.

TABLE 1.1: Distribution of Respondents According to Sex

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Male	1098	61
Female	702	39
Total	1800	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2014

TABLE 1.2: Distribution of Age Range of Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
18-25	502	28
26-33	612	34
34-41	386	21
42 and above	300	17
Total	1800	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2014

TABLE 1.3: Distribution of Marital Status of Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Single	900	50
Married	846	47
Divorced	54	3
Total	1800	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2014

TABLE 1.4: Distribution of Educational Level of Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Primary	54	3
Secondary	846	47
Tertiary	900	50
Total	1800	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2014

From table 1.1, it is evident from the data gathered that there were more male respondents (61%) than the female respondents (39%). Also, from table 1.2 of the age range distribution, the age range of 26-33 years recorded the highest level of participation with 34% participation, while those of 42 years and above recorded the lowest level of participation with 17%. In addition to the above, in table 1.3, reflecting the marital status of respondents, there seems to be not much to take from the marital status of participants as singles recorded 50% participation and married persons recorded 47% participation level. The remaining 3% belonged to those who are divorced. However, in table 1.4, which is the distribution of educational level of respondents stated above, education proved to be a major factor among those who participated because, those who received secondary and tertiary education accounted for 97% as compared to those primary education or less with 3%.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis One

H₀: There is no relationship between political participation and political stability.

H_R: There is a relationship between political participation and political stability

Relationship between political participation and political stability	Male	Female	Total
Yes	32a	11b	43
No	140c	97d	237
Total	172	108	280

$$X^2 = \frac{n(ad-bc)^2}{(a+b)(c+d)(a+c)(b+d)}$$

Research Decision

Calculated $X^2 = 3.6179$

Critical $X^2 = 2.71$

$\alpha = 10$

Research Result

Calculated $X^2 > \text{Critical } X^2 \alpha 10$

Data are statistically significant at 10% sampling error. Reject H_0 and accept H_R

Hypothesis Two

H_0 : There is no relationship between political participation and good governance.

H_R : There is a relationship between political participation and good governance

Political participation and good governance	Male	Female	Total
Yes	52	20	72
No	120	88	208
Total	172	108	280

$$X^2 = \frac{n(ad-bc)^2}{(a+b)(c+d)(a+c)(b+d)}$$

$$X^2 = \frac{280(52 \times 88 - 20 \times 120)^2}{(52+20)(120+88)(52+120)(20+88)}$$

$$= \frac{280(4576 - 2400)^2}{72 \times 208 \times 172 \times 108}$$

$$= \frac{28(2176)^2}{278194176}$$

$$= \frac{280 \times 2734976}{278194176}$$

$$= \frac{1325,793280}{278,194176}$$

$$= 4.7657$$

$$d.f = (r-1)(c-1)$$

$$= (2-1)(2-1) = 1$$

Research Decision

Calculated $X^2 = 4.7657$

Critical $X^2 = 3.84$

$\alpha = 05$

Research Results

Calculated $X^2 > \text{Critical } X^2 \alpha 05$

Data are statistically significant at 5% sampling error, Reject H_0 and accept H_R .

Hypothesis Three

H_0 : There is no relationship between electoral violence and the level of political participation

H_R : There is a relationship between electoral violence and the level of political participation.

Electoral Violence and political participation	Male	Female	Total
Yes	124a	92b	216
No	48c	16d	46
Total	172	108	280

$$X^2 = \frac{n(ad-bc)^2}{(a+b)(c+d)(a+c)(b+d)}$$

$$X^2 = \frac{280(124 \times 16 - 92 \times 48)^2}{(124+92)(48+16)(128+48)(92+16)}$$

$$= \frac{280(1984 - 4416)^2}{216 \times 64 \times 172 \times 108}$$

$$= \frac{280(2432)^2}{256794624}$$

$$= \frac{280 \times 2734976}{256,794,624}$$

$$= 1656094720$$

$$256794624$$

$$= 6.4491$$

$$d.f = (r-1) (c-1)$$

$$= (2-1) (2-1) = 1$$

Research Decision

Calculated $X^2 = 6.4491$
 Critical $X^2 = 5.41$
 $\alpha = 0.02$

Research Result

Calculated $X^2 > \text{Critical } X^2 @ \alpha.02$
 Data are statistically significant at 20% sampling error. Reject H_0 and accept H_R

Hypothesis Four

H_0 : There is no relationship between wealth and political participation.

H_R : There is a relationship between wealth and political participation.

Wealth and Political Participation	Male	Female	Total
Yes	72a	16b	88
No	100c	92d	192
Total	172	108	280

$$X^2 = \frac{n(ad-bc)^2}{(a+b)(c+d)(a+c)(b+d)}$$

$$X^2 = 280 \frac{(72 \times 92 - 16 \times 100)^2}{(28+92)(172+108)}$$

$$= 280 \frac{(6624 - 1600)^2}{(120)(272)}$$

$$= 280 \frac{(5024)^2}{32640}$$

$$= 280 \times 1540576$$

$$= 431361280$$

$$= 70.7695$$

$$d.f = (r-1) (c-1)$$

$$= (2-1) (2-1) = 1$$

Research Decision

Calculated $X^2 = 70.7695$
 Critical $X^2 = 10.83$
 $\alpha = .001$

Research Result

Calculated $X^2 > \text{critical } X^2 @ \alpha.001$

Data are statistically significant at .001% sampling error. Reject H_0 and accept H_R

Field study also showed that there is relationship between political stability and participation in hypothesis 1 above, giving credence to the view that political participation enhances political stability. When a fairly large number of people are able to partake in political issues, the political system is likely going to be peaceful and stable. Along the same line, it was also observed that there is a relationship between political participation and good governance. This is understandable to the extent that without political participation the idea of good governance will remain elusive.

Indeed, no meaningful economic development can take place, since it will amount to injustice to withhold from citizens the ordinary privilege of having their voice reckoned in matters in which they have interest. It was also observed that there is a relationship between electoral violence and the level of political participation in hypothesis 3 above. This is a negative relationship as electoral violence constitutes an impediment to high level of political participation. This is especially true since there have been instances where thugs were used to intimidate the electorates. This has nevertheless have the tendency of making subsequent elections to be marred by low voter's turnout. Finally in hypothesis 4 above, it was also found that there is a relationship between wealth and political participation. This can be better understood within the context of the idea of 'godfatherism',

and money politics. In the particular situation of 2012 Edo State Gubernatorial election, the godfathers in the People's Democratic Party (PDP) favoured General Charles Arhiavbere (rtd) who purportedly had a lot of money. Adams Oshiomhole, on his part, decided to pitch tent with the ACN, a wealthier platform than his erstwhile Labour Party.

THE 2012 GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION IN EDO STATE

The 2012 Governorship election in Edo State has been described as one that gave victory to the deserving candidate (Sango, 2013). The developmental stride of the labour leader Comrade Adams Oshiomhole was a welcome deviation from the retrogressive tendencies of the erstwhile ruling party, the People's Democratic Party (PDP), The Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), was in the eye of majority of the people, a party that was more committed to development.

TABLE 1.5:Electoral Results From Each Local Government by the Two Political Parties

L.G.A	ACN	PDP
Akoko Edo	29,803	13,783
Egor	50,623	3,486
Esan North East	13,060	12,478
Esan Central	11,792	9,281
Esan South East	14,904	9,634
Esan west	13,499	13,282
Etsako Central	16,834	5,113
Etsako East	14,904	9,634
Etsako west	44,962	5,920
Igueben	9,715	6,505
IkpobaOkha	58,809	6,505
Oredo	66,552	9,081
Orhionmwon	26,163	8,716
Ovia North East	26,835	5,427
Ovia South West	16,077	5,015
Owan East	22,483	11,709
Owan West	15, 150	7,229
Uhunmwonde	17,011	5,826

Source: Federal ministry of Information www.FMI.Nigeria.Com.

Table 2.1 shows the results of the major political parties, the ACN and the PDP. Other parties that participated in the election include All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), Labour Party (LP), National Conscience Party (NCP) and Social Democratic Mega Party (SDMP)

The election had a tinge of elitism which is a constant theme of the contestation as proven from hypothesis 4 and in table 1.4 above showing the overwhelming majority of educated elites accounting for 47% and 50% respectively participating and dominating the electoral processes in Nigeria. As Sango (2013:16) Observed, the decision by Comrade Adams Oshiomhole to remain with one of the two hegemonic parties (ACN) shows the enormous influence of wealth in Nigerian politics. It is incisive to note that Comrade Adams Oshiomhole made his foray into politics through the Labour Party (LP). Having discovered that there were certain limitations in the LP, he decided to switch, in 2007, to the then Action Congress (AC), which subsequently metamorphosed into Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN); Which subsequently joined forces with some other opposition parties to form the present day All Progressives Congress (APC).

CONCLUSION

The overall ambition of this paper has been the attempt at scrutinizing political participation in Edo State within the confines of Nigeria's democracy. It is fair therefore to suggest that, there is little that most ordinary Nigerians like about their political system. Part of the problem is that Nigeria is one of the most deeply divided and fragmented countries of the world. The country has well over two hundred distinct ethnic groups. And most states (the component units) are composed of an amalgam of different ethnic groups with the corresponding crises of access to political power and official positions. Apart from ethnic divisions, the political landscape has also been influenced by deep religious divisions.

Although some Nigerians actually see themselves as Nigerians, the overwhelming majority, nevertheless identify with their ethnic base. Therefore, in their engagement with the political system, they tend to play the ethnic card. Political participation in this research work was thus discussed and analyzed in the context of the ethno religious and elitist slant of the Nigerian political system. Politicians, political parties and other stakeholders in the political system mobilize support on the basis of ethno-religious and patron-client

relationships.

The political and economic elite in Nigeria roughly equate to the bourgeois class which Marx famously anticipated. In Nigeria, however, recourse to ethnic and religious sentiments tends to downplay these elitist and bourgeois tendencies. Ordinary citizens, while participating in politics lose sight of the overbearing influence of wealth and the elites, since they are often enmeshed in ethno-religious and regional politics. Thus, there is a class of political and bureaucratic officials who have used their positions for tremendous personal and crony gain, and who, like the typical bourgeoisie have been able to protect their wealth and power under successive civilian or democratic dispensations (Dudley, 1982:52). In the high stake of political participation in Nigerian politics, elites of the defeated party are cut out of the process of wealth accumulation and distribution.

The Edo State gubernatorial election of 2012 followed this trend. Comrade Adams Aliu Oshiomhole consolidated on his elitist status by sticking to the then Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) rather than the Labour Party. He was, therefore able to successfully challenge the threat posed by the wealthy candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Gen Charles Arhivbere (rtd). As for the voters, the choice was between two hegemonic political parties with economic resources, while less emphasis was placed on the usual ethnic politics.

In the light of the above tendencies we can identify certain indices that face Nigeria as a developing country trying to sustain high political participation and democratic stability. It is important to state that there is a limited and grudging sense of national identity or integration. The values that matter most to voters lead them to define who they are politically on the basis of where they stand on those sub-national, overlapping and polarizing cleavages. We must, however, note that in the Edo State election of 2012, this law of Nigerian politics was downplayed. The relative performance of comrade Adams Oshiomhole in his first tenure ensured that the frontiers of this tendency were pegged back. The election also highlights the fact that elite culture can change quickly with a set of development oriented leaders mounting the helms of affair of a countervailing hegemonic political party (ACN) to literally sweep away the dominance of the erstwhile PDP, a sense or culture of accountability was instilled in governance. Indeed, political discussions now place the people at the center of proceedings. This is not to suggest that the ACN had the answers to all the political problems of Edo State, but to argue that they have provided an ample guarantee and opportunity for the people to express themselves politically either as individuals or as part of groups. Populist theory of democracy suggests that democracy and its process function to make political decisions based on the collective will of the people. The will of the people is thus determined by the participation of the people in voting, their involvement in political and public affairs, and their expression of opinions and thoughts. The strength of democracy, therefore, is a function of the extent to which the people participate in political and public affairs.

Indeed, since the era of political theorists like Rousseau and John Stuart Mill, there have been a general consensus that democracy is enhanced by the extent to which the will of the people influence the actions of government. Thus, voting has often been seen as the most common act of democratic citizenship. In the modern era, representative government has provided the opportunity for citizens to contribute to the governance process. It is easy to see that in most modern democratic government, sovereignty, the supreme and overarching political power is vested in the entire aggregate of the community. Thus, citizens do not just have a voice in the exercise of that ultimate power, but are in reality called to take part in actual governance. Effective participation is therefore a *sine qua non* for perfect democratic process. Emphasis has recently been placed on the opportunity for participation in decision making process and not just the manifestation of it. Throughout the process of making binding decisions, citizens ought to have an adequate opportunity, and an equal opportunity, for expressing their preferences as to the final outcome.

Therefore, the propensity for a system to be more democratic is when participation by people to influence decision making increases. Voting is one of the easiest ways for citizens to participate in the democratic process, as it represents the will of the people. In elections, people vote for representatives that they believe are most in line with their political beliefs and views. In turn the decisions made by this elected representatives are based on the will and aspirations of the people. It is in this light that representative government can be seen in terms of the whole people, or some numerous portions of them exercising through deputies periodically elected by them the ultimate controlling power.

Overtime, politics in Nigeria have been dominated by political bosses, more popularly referred to as godfathers. These sets of politicians manipulate the decision making processes of most political parties to suit their whims and caprice. Under the present circumstance, it becomes very difficult for citizens to effectively dictate the levels of economic, social and political development in the country. In addition, the Nigerian political terrain continue to reflect the domination of the educated, less of uneducated which constitutes the vast majority whilst the electoral processes are mainly dominated by the male electorates vis a viz the females, all these nevertheless impedes the active political participation and the Nigerian democracy.

RECOMMENDATION

Nigeria electoral agency should resolve to conduct Free and fair elections that will ensure inclusiveness of

citizens in the governance process. It will then be safe to argue that the outcome of elections represents the people's wishes and aspirations. Also of great importance is the question of voter turnout. If less people are expressing their will, this means lower voter and the less accurate the will of the people will be. If Nigeria is to improve on its democratic credentials it must, as a matter of urgency address the imperfections of its electoral and democratic processes. In addressing these imperfections, we must look beyond the idea of participation during elections.

The question of internal democracy within political parties must also be resolved. Members of political parties must actively take part in the processes through which candidates emerge.

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