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Political Participation in Nigerian Democracy: A Study of Some Selected Local Government Areas in Ondo State, Nigeria

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Abstract- This paper examined the extent to which the citizens are involved in political activities. The study adopted both qualitative and quantitative means of data collection. A questionnaire titled Political Participation Attitude Scale (PPAS) was the quantitative instrument used for the study. A Focus Group Guide on Political Participation (FGGPP) was used to obtain qualitative data. Three research questions were raised and answered in the study. The findings of the study revealed that 57% of the participants were not actively involved in political activities. Also, there was effect of gender on political participation. 30% and 13% of males and females respectively were highly involved in political activities. Also, 38% and 12% of males and females respectively were regularly involved in voting exercise. In addition, it was discovered in the study that majority (53%) of the respondents had no confidence in their political leaders. On the basis of the findings of this study, it is recommended that there is urgent need for formal and informal approaches to political education in Nigeria. Also, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should put machinery in place to ensure mass participation of the Nigerian citizen in the coming 2015 general election.

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POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIAN DEMOCRACY A STUDY OF SOME SELECTED LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS IN ONDO STATE, NIGERIA

Strictly as per the compliance and regulations of:



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I. INTRODUCTION

The political stability and development of any political system is a function of the awareness and positive involvement of the citizens in civic and political matters. This is the reason why Appadorai (2004) posited that democracy demands from the common man a certain level of ability and character: rational conduct and active participation in the government. In Nigeria, political activities and transition programmes have been marked with turbulence, uncertainties and violence. Right from the First Republic, the Nigerian politics is characterized by greed, love of power, violence, assassination, thuggery and election rigging.

Violence has become synonymous with Nigeria's political culture such that virtually all elections held so far in the country are violent-ridden (Ojo, 2014). Although the Nigeria general election which was held in 2011 was relatively peaceful, however, it was also marked with some irregularities. According to Okpi

(2011), although the national assembly election held on Saturday, April 9 2011 has been appraised by many as successful, some cases of malpractices and violence recorded across the country threaten to dim light on democratic progress. During the election, there were reported cases of underage voting, distribution of money at polling centers, manipulation of voters' register, diversion of electoral materials, ballot box snatching, unlawful possession of firearms and other electoral offences. This political scenario engendered lukewarm political attitude and participation among some citizens.

In a political system, the citizens can be involved in the political process and decision making by joining political party, voting during election, participating in electoral campaign, community affairs and other political activities. The level and pattern of political participation of the citizens determine, to some extent, the success of the political system. In Nigeria, politics is seen by a number of people as a dirty game which must be avoided. This is as a result of the undemocratic tendencies, deception, violence and uncertainties that characterize the political system. Commenting on the political apathy displaced by Nigerian citizens during the 2011 general election, The INEC chairman, Professor Attairu Jega lamented:

That there exists voters' apathy in Nigeria is no longer contentious. Voters turnout in the just concluded general elections had provided a scientific and empirical evidence of the existence of voters apathy and disinterestedness of sections of the electorates in elections...This ugly scenario has implications for popular participation and governance. (Odebode, 2011. P.2)

This is corroborated by the report of an interview conducted during the 2011 election. One of the respondents said "My father told me not to vote when I was leaving home. This morning, my father said I was wasting my time. He said all politicians were the same and it would make no difference". Statistical analysis of the 2011 general elections showed that only 35% of the registered electorates voted during the election. Commenting on this the INEC chairman expressed that the scientific evidence of poor turn-out of voters during the election was at variance with the belief that Nigerians

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showed much enthusiasm during the polls (Odebode, 2011).

The development and sustenance of true democracy in Nigeria depends, to a large extent, on the electoral system. The confidence of the citizens in the electoral system and their participation in the electoral process are requisites for the enthronement of responsible and democratic leaders. The success of the 2015 Nigeria general election requires transparent electoral process and mass participation of the electorates.

II. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of this paper is to examine the level of political participation in some selected Local Government Areas in Ondo State, Nigerian. The study also intends to discover the reasons for political apathy in Nigeria and to find out the extent to which the citizens trust and have confidence in their political leaders.

a) *Democracy as a Concept*

The term democracy is derived from two Greek words: *demos* which means people and *kratos* which means rule. Literarily, democracy means 'rule by the people' Appadorai (2004) described democracy as a system of government under which the people exercise the governing power either directly or through representatives periodically elected by them. In the ancient states, direct democracy was possible because all adult members of the community could easily take part in decision making. Population growth and expansion in political boundaries have made direct democracy impracticable in the modern political system. This is the reason why representative democracy has replaced direct democracy in different parts of the world. Representative democracy is an indirect democracy where sovereignty is held by the people's representatives. Watter Lanqueur cited in Idowu (1998) pointed out that although the conditions of modern state make direct participation of all the people in government of the state impossible, the concept of democracy still emphasises the rule of the people. That is, the sovereign power is indirectly exercised by the people through a system of representation.

Consequently, political participation, particularly in the electoral process, is a fundamental requirement of representative democracy. This is the reason why Appadorai (2004) argued that where, on account of an atmosphere of fear and coercion, people do not feel free to discuss or vote, democracy cannot be said to exist, even though the other political rights are enjoyed by the people. Sovereignty (2010) identified some of the requirements of democratic rule as: at least two party system to give room for freedom of choice; periodic election that is based on universal adult suffrage; free and fair election to allow the political party that has the support of the majority to control the machinery of

government and civil liberties such as freedom of association, religion, speech and freedom from arbitrary arrest.

Representative democracy rests on the assumptions that the citizens possess and demonstrate some civic capacities. These civic capacities involve three qualities: intelligence, self-control and conscience. The citizens must be able to understand the interest of the community, to subordinate his own will to the general will and must feel his responsibility to the community and be prepared to serve it by voting (Appadorai, 2004). In the contrary, indolence, indifference and political apathy have hindered the entrenchment and sustenance of representative democracy in Nigeria. Falade and Orungbemi (2010) argued that true democratic governance is absent in Nigeria and many parts of Africa. The political culture in Nigeria is characterized by intolerance, intimidation, thuggery, assassination, bitterness, apathy, indolence, money and ethnic politics. As a result of this, the ingredients of democracy have not been able to thrive after many years of political independence in Nigeria.

b) *Political participation in Nigeria*

Political participation is the involvement of the citizens in the political system. Eakin cited in Adelekan (2010) described political participation as the process through which the individual plays a role in the political life of his society and has the opportunity to take part in deciding what common goals of the society are and the best way of achieving these goals. According to Akamare (2003) political participation is an aspect of political behaviour and it focuses on the way in which individuals take part in politics. It is a voluntary activity and one may participate directly or indirectly. The various ways by which the people can be involved in the political system include selection or election of political leaders, formulation of policies, community activities and other civic engagements.

According to Awolowo and Aluko (2010), the essence of political participation in any society, either civilized or primitive, is to seek control of power, acquisition of power and to influence decision making. Political participation is a means of contributing ones quota to the political system and overall development of the nation. Political participation is one of the fundamental requirements of democratic governance. This is the reason why Adelekan (2010) emphasized that ideally, democracy means individual participation in the decisions that involves one's life. In a democratic system, there is the necessity for the citizenry to be fully involved in the democratic procedures of the choice of rulers and effective communication of the public policies and attitudes. Any claim to democratic regime or state must essentially embrace a high degree of competitive choice, openness, and enjoyment of civic and political liberties and political participation that

involves all groups of the society (Arowolo and Aluko, 2010).

The extent to which people participate in the political system differ from person to person. Falade (2008) identified six types of political participants. These are: The inactive: These are the people that take no part in any .political activity Voting specialists: These are the people that get eagerly engaged only in voting. Besides voting, they are not concerned about other political activities. Parochial participants: These people participate in politics occasionally. They vote or get involve in any other political activity only when it affects their personal interest. The communalist: These are those who get engaged in voting regularly, they also get involve in community affairs but they are not involved in political campaign activities The campaigners: They are actively involved in political campaign but inactive in other community affairs. Complete activists: They are highly involved in all political activities. They actively participate in voting, political campaign, community activities and make contact with public officials.

Some of the factors that determine political participation are: cultural, economic, political, religious and educational backgrounds of individuals. Also, the level of political awareness as well as the measure of confidence in the political process determines the extent to which the citizens participate in the political system. In Nigeria, politics is influenced by money, ethnic and religious factors. Since independence in 1960, religious and ethnic politics characterize electioneering process in Nigeria. This is the reason why Albert Legogie, former deputy Senate President, pointed out that it was clear from the trend of the election that there was a big gulf, a dichotomy between the north and the south and between Christians and Muslims (Adeyemo, 2011). For instance, during the post-presidential election violence in the Muslim dominated northern part of Nigeria, southerners and Christians were attacked and killed while many churches were burnt. Falade, (2007) expressed that politics in Nigeria is regarded as a dirty game and it is practiced with bitterness, hatred, rancor and other associated evils. The outcome of this is that Nigeria is in vicious cycle of political crises and instability.

Deceit and unfulfilled promises by political leaders discouraged a number of Nigerians from participating in election and other political activities. Falade (2008) argued that politicians make series of promises during election campaign. Most of these promises are not fulfilled after they had been voted in to power. As a result of this, some voters loose interest in election. One of the respondents interviewed during the 2011 election expressed that "I have come to the sun to suffer even though I am not benefiting anything from the government...I don't even have confidence in them because they have been failing us generally" (Adelakun, 2011).

There is low level of political participation among the Nigerian citizens. Many Nigerians are indifferent in political matters. The INEC noted that Nigerians' participation during the last general election in the 2011 was low. Only 35% of the 70 million registered voters took part in the election. The Friedrich Elbert Stiffing Foundation conducted a research on the 2011 election and identified lack of transparent elections, election violence and politicians' non-committal to their campaign promises as major reasons for voters' apathy in the country (Odebo, 2011).

The political apathy in Nigeria is based on the twin problems of ignorance and deliberate deception by some politicians. The consequence of this is the inability of the masses to have a link between their state of underdevelopment and their non participation in the electoral process (Fabiya, 2010). In the light of this Falade (2007) concluded that the Nigerian political culture has not given room for the entrenchment and sustenance of true democracy. Awolowo and Aluko(2010) expressed that the low level of political participation of the Nigerian women is becoming alarming and disturbing. Since the emergence of political independence in 1960, the Nigerian women have remained invisible in the political process. The 1985 Beijing declaration to which Nigeria is a signatory provides that 30% of all positions in government should be given to women. This policy is yet to be implemented in Nigeria because there is a continuing trend of male domination of political and other public positions (Oloyede, 2004; Adelekan, 2010).The marginal involvement of African women in the political process results from the lingering inhibitive cultural and patriarchal forces against women's engagement in politics that characterized African traditional societies (Chuku, 2009).

III. METHODOLOGY

a) *Research Design*

This study is descriptive in nature. The survey design is used in the conduct of this research. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were adopted to obtain the data used in the study.

b) *Subject*

The qualitative data was obtained through Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and interview. Twenty (20) participants were involved in the focus group activities. Participants were selected from four different local government areas in Ondo State. The criteria for the selection of participants are: gender, occupation, age, local government area, and education. Five (5) participants from each local government areas were involved in the FGD.

Also, one hundred (100) subjects were used to gather the quantitative data. The subjects were randomly selected from thirteen (13) different Wards in

Ondo State. The subjects were made up of people of eighteen (18) years and above and from all works of life.

c) *Instrument*

Two instruments were designed and used in the study. The first instrument is a questionnaire used for quantitative data. The questionnaire is titled Political Participation Attitude Scale (PPAS). This questionnaire is made up of two sections. Section A is concerned with personal information while section B is made up of 23 items on the attitude of the citizens to politics and their involvement in the political process. The second instrument titled Focus Group Guide on Political Participation (FGGPP) was used for qualitative data. The FGGPP was designed to elicit participants' responses on their attitude to politics and the level of their involvement in political activities. Both instruments were given expert validity.

d) *Research Questions*

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. Will the subjects demonstrate high level of political participation in the democratic process?
2. Will there be higher level of political participation among the male than female?
3. Do the citizens have trust and confidence in their political leaders?

e) *Analysis of Data*

The research questions raised for this study were given both qualitative and quantitative analyses.

f) *Qualitative Analysis*

The Focus Group Discussion and interview were recorded and transcribed. The report of the

interview and discussion showed that all the participants registered for voting and had voters' registration cards. However, 90% of the participants did not cast their votes during the general election. Some of the reasons why they abstained from election were: the thuggery, chaotic and violent situations that characterized the voting centers; distance and no means of transportation; names not found on the voters register and lack of confidence in the electoral process. The report of the FDG also revealed that male participants were more politically conscious than their female counterparts. 65% and 50% of males and females respectfully were aware and could clearly state some of their human rights. Generally more than 70% of the participants had no access to the Nigerian constitution.

Again, it was discovered that the participants were not involved in the process of decision making. All the participants responded that they were not involved in decisions that affect their own lives. They also pointed out that even when their opinions were sought, their feelings and needs were not reflected in political decisions and policies. More than 80% of the participants expressed that they had no confidence in the political leaders. They observed that political leaders are corrupt and selfish; they are not honest, transparent and trustworthy.

g) *Quantitative Analysis*

The quantitative data obtained in this study are analyzed on the basis of the research questions that were generated.

Research Question 1: Will the subjects demonstrate high level of political participation in the democratic process?

Table 1: Level of Political Participation by the Subjects

S/N	ITEMS	AGREE	%	DISAGREE	%
1	I am highly involve in political activities	43	43	57	57
2	I vote always	50	50	50	50
3	I play some roles in politics	54	54	46	46
4	Nigerian democracy gives room for mass participation	31	31	69	69
5	There are stringent conditions required for taking part in Nigerian politics	87	87	13	13
6	My parents/ relations are in support of my playing politics	41	41	59	59

Table 1 shows that only 43% of the participants were highly involved in political activities; 50% always cast their votes; 54% played some roles in politics; 69% responded that the Nigerian democracy does not give room for mass participation; 89% believed that there are stringent conditions required for taking part in Nigerian

politics and 59% responded that their parents/ relations are not in support of their playing politics.

Research Question 2: Will there be higher level of political participation among male than female members of the community?

Table 2: Effect of Gender on Political Participation

S/N	ITEM	AGREE	MALE	%	FEMALE	%
1	I am highly involved in political activities	43	30	30	13	13
2	I vote always	50	38	38	12	12

Table 2 presents the gender analysis of the number of people that agreed with some statements in the questionnaire. 30% of males and 13% of females responded that they were highly involved in political

activities. Also 38% and 12% of males and females respectively were always involved in voting exercise.

Research Question 3: Do the people have confidence and trust in their political leaders?

Table 3 : level of trust and confidence in political leaders

S/N	ITEMS	AGREE	%	DISAGREE	%
1	Political leaders are trustworthy and dedicated to the needs of the community	47	47	53	53
2	Political leaders usually fulfill their promises after electioneering	12	12	88	88
3	Political leaders are responsive to the needs of the people	30	30	70	70

Table 3 reveals that 47% of the respondents had confidence in their leaders while 53% did not trust their political leaders. 88% responded that political leaders were not used to fulfilling their promises after electioneering and 70% responded that political leaders were not responsive to the needs of the people.

IV. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study showed that there was low level of political participation among the sampled respondents. Only 43% of the people were highly involved in political activities. Also, just half, that is, 50% of the people regularly cast their votes. These findings are corroborated by the qualitative report that the participants merely registered and got voters registration cards. Just about 10% of those who participated in the qualitative study did cast their votes during the 2007 gubernatorial election in Ondo State. This finding is further corroborated by the Friedrich Ebert Stiffing Foundation's analysis of the 2011 general election that just 35% of registered voters took part in the election. The non-participation of most registered voters in the 2007 voting exercise in Ondo State as well as the 2011 general election in Nigeria is an obstacle to democratic governance.

This political apathy is one of the factors responsible for electoral fraud and manipulations by desperate politicians. For instance, in preparation for electoral fraud during the April 2011 general election, politicians were reported buying up voters' card at the rate of ten thousand naira (#10,000.00) per card. Some of the victims of this dubious act were famished and politically indifferent people in some parts of the country including Kwara, Kano, Rivers, Katsina, Adamawa and Bayelsa states (Agbo, 2011). The failure of registered voters to participate in voting exercise during the election is an obstacle to democratic governance. This is because non-participation in the electoral process is a means of installing bad and unpopular leaders.

This study also revealed that there was effect of gender on political participation. More males (30%) than females (13%) were highly involved in political activities. Again, more males (38%) than females (12%) were regularly involved in voting exercise. Olojede (1990) pointed out that although the Nigerian constitution

permits women to take part in the political life of the nation, however evidence shows that women's role in politics has been peripheral. The participation of women in Nigerian politics is mostly limited to membership of women's wing of political parties, clapping, dancing, and cooking for the men at political rallies and party meetings (Akande, 2002). Arowolo and Aluko (2010) reported that women usually face massive resistance from participating in politics. They discovered that only 39.7% of husbands could allow their wives to participate in politics. They also discovered that a lot of female respondents believed that politics would prevent them from taking absolute care of their families. Hence the fear of broken homes, breeding irresponsible children and need to perform their domestic activities were identified as major reasons preventing women from going into politics.

The findings of this study showed that majority of the respondents (53%) did not trust their political leaders. 53% of the respondents disagreed with the statement that political leaders were trustworthy. This finding is further supported by the qualitative report that more than 80% of the participants expressed that they had no confidence in their political leaders. The findings of this study are in agreement with previous finding of Mattes, Keulder, Chikwana, Afirca and Davids (2003) that popular trust in political institutions remains at relatively low levels. Mattes *et al* (2003) investigated the extent to which South Africans trusted their leaders. They discovered that just over one third (37%) trusted the president and just under a third (31%) trusted the parliament. One quarter (28%) trusted provincial government; Premier, (28%) and Local Government, (24%).

The findings of this study revealed that the way politics and governance are practiced in Nigeria discourage some people from political participation. According to Ojo (2014) between 1960 and 2011, Nigeria had conducted several general and regional elections. A survey of the political history of post independence Nigeria shows that these elections were marred by electoral violence as they were not conducted in atmosphere of electoral security. Adekunle (2007) pointed out that during the 2007 general election in Nigeria there were cases of political thugs who openly

displayed machetes and guns to intimidate and prevent people from coming out to vote.

The relative political peace that characterized the 2011 general election accounted for better political involvement of the electorates. For instance during the 2011 election, many young and old people who were first time voters trooped out to vote. For many of them, they deliberately passed up the opportunity in 1999, 2003 and 2007 (Adelakun, 2011). However, findings revealed that even with the reported cases of first time voters during the 2011 election, only 35% of registered voters participated in the election. This implies that there is still much to be done to ensure that most registered voters participate in the 2015 general election. This is the only means of electing the right candidates and entrenching true democratic governance in Nigeria.

One of the questions that arise from the findings of this study is "How democratic is the Nigerian political system?" During the 1999, 2003 and 2007 elections, the electoral process was not free and fair. It was marked with manipulations, violence, intimidation, ballot stuffing, fraud and allocation of figures (Adebanjo, 2003). That is, those who got to the political offices were elected by minority voters and through fraudulent practices rather than through transparent and majority votes. In the case of the 2011 election, the elected executives and legislative members were voted in by less than 35% of the electorates. Falade, (2008) argued that any government that is not voted in by the majority of the electorates is not representative.

V. CONCLUSION

There is low level of political participation in Nigeria. Many Nigerians are not committed to the electoral process and other political engagements. This study revealed that the Nigerian political system and act of governance do not encourage mass participation. This is because of the political culture of violence, intimidation, manipulation, sentiments, money politics, ignorance, corruption, deception and apathy that characterize the political system. There is marginal involvement of the Nigerian women in the political process. Cultural issues, domestic responsibilities, financial constraints and political indifference are some of the factors preventing women participation in politics.

This study also showed that Nigerians do not have trust and confidence in their political leaders. Most political leaders were found to be selfish and not responsive to the needs of the citizens. Political leaders made promises that were never fulfilled after gaining political power. Democratic and responsible governance have not been entrenched into the Nigerian political system.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the findings of this study it is recommended that there is urgent need for political

education in Nigeria. Political education should not be limited to the school system. Both formal and informal approaches should be adopted to orientate the citizens on the need for active participation in the political system. There is the need for mass political enlightenment through the media, adult education programme and civil associations. The citizens should be conscious of the danger of their political apathy.

There is also particular need for greater emphasis on girl child education. This will help to erase the traditional gender stereotypes that have affected women involvement in politics. The women fold need to be intellectually empowered as a means of reducing the problem of gender inequality in the Nigerian society. Girl child education can be promoted through enlightenment campaign and financial support by Governmental and Non Governmental Agencies.

Lastly, the Independent National Electoral Commission should put in place machinery that will ensure mass participation of the electorates during the Nigeria 2015 general election. INEC should be more transparent and impartial at every stage of the electioneering process. The electoral process should be devoid of sentiment, favoritism, fraud, violence and intimidation. Any one who violates electoral procedure and policies should immediately be brought to book. This will help to install sanity and confidence in the electoral process and thereby enhance political participation.

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