

VOTER APATHY AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN SOUTH EAST: EVIDENCE FROM THREE CONSECUTIVE ELECTIONS

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Abstract

This paper discusses voter Apathy and political development in the South East. South East is one of the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria which has the least number of states among other zones, domiciled by people who are business inclined and naturally industrious. Using documentary method of data collection, the paper extensively explores voter apathy in the South East and discovers that voter apathy in the South East is a rational choice of the people who place their normal business activities above every other political activity. The paper is guided by these objectives, to ascertain the extent voter apathy scuttle political participation in the South East, to discover the extent electoral malpractices affect voter turnout in the South East. Voting is a civic responsibility every citizen owes his or her country, the paper recommends that individual actors resident in South East should see voting as a duty and political participation as a responsibility for adequate political development in the geopolitical zone. To achieve this, the electoral umpire {INEC} should strictly adhere to electoral act and electoral laws that ensure free, credible and transparent elections in Nigeria.

Keywords: Voter Apathy, Political Participation, Electoral Malpractices, Rational Choice.

Introduction

Nigeria has three major ethnic groups which includes Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo. Hausa people are mostly Muslims occupying the Northern part of Nigeria. “The Hausa/Fulani are the largest ethnic group in Nigeria” (Obikeze and Onuselogu, 2009, p.24). Another major ethnic group in Nigeria is Yoruba. Yoruba people occupy the Western part of Nigeria belonging to the geopolitical zone known as South West. Obikeze and Onuselogu (2009, p.26) observe that “Yoruba originated from one common ancestor called Oduduwa and the religious focus centered on the Ile-Ife”. Igbo is another major ethnic group in Nigeria found in the Eastern part of the country belonging to South East geopolitical zone which includes Anambra, Imo, Enugu, Ebonyi and Abia.

South East is a geopolitical zone domiciled by Igbo people who are naturally industrious and entrepreneurial. It is evident that, South Eastern people are entrepreneurially involved in businesses and other commercial activities. Their entrepreneurial ingenuity is globally commended and fortunately they are recognized as the most industrious tribe in Nigeria. Their ardent love for business and other commercial activities has deprived them of other political engagement which encourages voter apathy in the geopolitical zone.

Voter apathy is a global plague. There is universal conformation of voter apathy that is absence of Citizens participation and passionate unconcern towards civic obligations and political activities (Moliki and Dauda, 2014). One disadvantageous effect of voter apathy or outright disengagement in politics is that it gives wrong people access to power. When many citizens are apolitical, the emergence of a wrong person looms. When many say it does not concern us, the few ones in the polling units will manipulate things in favour of a wrong person. In concurrence with Moliki and Dauda, Fagunwa (2015) observes that, the decrease in voters' participation appears to be a general phenomenon across the globe. This

means that voter apathy does not affect Nigeria only; rather it affects different countries of the world and bedevils political development in the affected countries.

Participation of citizens in political elections especially in countries where psychological value of votes is high legitimizes the government that comes to power after a democratic election. This encourages good governance and helps in consolidating democracies. But this is not the case of Nigeria where psychological and promissory values of vote are absolutely low, thereby encouraging voter apathy in the zone. For effective and healthy democracy, participation in politics is vital for easy change of government and leadership stability. In every democracy, election creates an avenue which allows citizens' involvement in choosing who represents their interests in government. Democracy seems to be a failed process when citizens are unconcerned about who emerged victorious in an election (Adekoya, 2019).

Voter apathy in the South East Nigeria is a problem that has been scuttling political development in the geopolitical zone. An average Igbo person from the South East prefers being in his or her business place to being in the polling units wasting his or her time under the sun in the guise of trying to vote, this is apathy in reality.

VOTER APATHY: Voter apathy describes a lack of interest on the part of some voter groups in taking part in elections. If voting is voluntary, one consequence of voter apathy may be a low voter turnout on Election Day. Voter indifference may appear as a high percentage of spoiled ballots or donkey votes in nations or regions where voting is required. The proportion of eligible voters who cast ballots in an election is known as the voter turnout. According to Pintor and Sullivan (2010), the percentage of voters who participated in an election (including those who submitted blank or invalid ballots) is the standard way to measure voter turnout. According to Geys (2006), it is the total number of voters in a particular election, and it is typically expressed as a percentage. Nweke & Etido-Inyang (2018) noted that a vote is only the formal decision voters make during an election. Citizens can express their preferences for or against a particular candidate who runs for office on their own or with the help of a political party by voting for or against them when they run for public or political office. The only person with the legal and constitutional authority to execute this crucial civic responsibility, right, or obligation is a voter. Apathy among voters has a negative impact on the election's outcome. The difficulties of voter indifference must be taken into consideration in any genuine attempt at electoral reforms to bring about free, fair, and legitimate elections (INEC, 2011). According to Okafor, Odigbo & Okeke (2022), voter apathy has drawn the attention of many academics over the years due to its increasingly negative effects on the democracies of nations within the global village. According to them voter apathy kills democracy of any country, especially developing countries like Nigeria. The degree to which representative democracy may be failing is revealed by the casual, uninterested, and apathetic attitudes that inhabitants of a certain nation display during elections. This is due to the undeniable reality that without a substantial turnout, there cannot be genuine elections because elections reflect the preferences of the people. A low voter turnout shows the preferences of a small number of people rather than the preferences of the majority of the population. The legitimacy of the new government is called into question as a result. But a large turnout of voters will confirm the legitimacy of the government as well as the validity of an election (Okafor *et al*, 2022).

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: The term political participation means the citizen's involvement in the political activities of their country. Political participation is wider in scope than electoral participation because it involves both legal and illegal activities involved in choosing who rules, unlike electoral participation that involves only legal activities whose ultimate goal is to influence the selection of public officials. By involving legal and illegal activities, political participation encompasses

a range of legal activities such as registration of voters, voting, contesting elections, nomination of candidates, making donation to parties, going to court to challenge the victory of a candidate by the skeptical opponents etc, and illegal activities such as engaging in political thuggery, snatching and burning of ballot boxes, disenfranchisement of eligible voters etc. While electoral participation involves only those legal activities mentioned above.

Political participation is defined as those voluntary activities by which members of a society share in the selection of rulers and, directly or indirectly, in the formation of public policy (H. McClosky, 1968; Dowse and Hughes, 1983:290), in Mba (2007:245). The central message of this lies in the fact that peoples' participation in choosing who governs them, qualifies their involvement in being part of the policy formulation either directly or indirectly. Indirect democracy offers citizens the constitutional power to choose those who represent their interests in government. "Citizens' participation is said to be good for the citizens because defenders of democracy believe that getting involved in decision making will expand the horizon of voters by giving them more awareness about issues of the day in the polity". (Mba, 2006: 135). This is in line with the fact that for democracy to survive in a country, the people's participation has a greater role to play. Many things contribute immensely to citizens' apathy in the political activities of their country; this could be lack of trust or confidence in the electoral umpire of their country, failed campaign promises, godfatherism, bad leadership etc. The persistence of these negative indicators sets in motion political apathy in the country. However, poor health may have a differential impact on political participation, depending on the type of health issue an individual faces and the barrier to participation it may represent. For example, while poor self-rated health (SRH) is associated with lower voter turnout, some health problems, such as cancer and asthma, were found to positively affect turnout (Gollust and Rahn 2015; Sund *et al.* 2017). Age is also one of the determinants of political participation because some old men and women in various villages and communities do not join campaigns, rallies, voter registration exercise and do not vote as well as a result of age incapacitation.

Voting is one of the most important parts of political participation because it gives the citizens the opportunity to choose for themselves among other alternatives. Citizens may have reasons to remain indoors during elections in a country where votes do not count. Any country where the psychological value of vote is low, citizens of the said country always believe that their votes would not make a difference thereby losing the political zeal to come and exercise their political right. Any country where political offices suffer violence, the violent politicians take it by force by bribing the electoral umpire against the will of the people, in that country, voter apathy is encouraged and political participation is slaughtered. The absolute hope of voting in an election is to influence the outcome of the election in the hope that the voter's preferred candidate will emerge winner of the election. This is seen in civilized countries where politicians are civilized, not in African countries where politicians are politically violent with a high need for power and where votes do not count.

Snatching and burning of ballot boxes, maiming and killing of voters during elections effectively encourage voter apathy and immensely reduce the rate of political participation in Nigerian. These are parts of the illegal activities involved in political participation as discussed above, because those involved in snatching and burning ballot boxes, maiming and killing voters and INEC official are also engaged in politics. Some of these illegal activities which were witnessed in the just concluded 2023 presidential election became parts of the irregularities that marred the election. "In Safana LGA of Katsina State, thugs attacked one of our voting locations and snatched six BVAS machines" INEC Chairman (*Punch*, Sunday February 26, 2023). Similar issue was recorded in Kuje area council. Angry thugs disrupted electoral activities at the Kayarda polling Centre of Kuje Area Council. The thugs destroyed sensitive materials in polling units, **026, 003 and 004** (*Vanguard*, Monday February 26, 2023). This aggressive participation in politics is sponsored by aggressive and violent politicians who are hell-bent on taking political offices by

force against the will of the masses. These illegal political activities discourage active participation among the citizens.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this study, we adopted the rational choice theory. One of the main theories for analyzing and forecasting the sociopolitical and economic tendencies of human behavior is the rational choice theory (RCT). The ideas behind this theory are said to have originated from Adam Smith in his 'Inquiry into the Nature and causes of the wealth of Nations 1776. The theory sees individual actors as the owners and controllers of their decisions. In making decisions, individual actors rationally weigh consequences and potential benefits of their actions. The theory believes that the reward of every action taken by individual actors is preeminent which must outweigh the cost of such actions. The theory explains that human behavior is founded on rational and understandable principles. RCT "offers a formal analysis of the process of rational decision-making under the assumption that individuals are capable of making reasoned decisions based on their goals and beliefs," according to Bakalova (2013, p.104). When Downs (1957) used the theory to explain electoral behavior and party rivalry, he popularized the RCT. According to Turner (1991), the fundamental premises of the RCT are that people act purposefully to achieve predetermined goals and that they have sets of hierarchically ordered preferences or utilities. A voter tends to vote for a party candidate who is a member of their own ethnic group because of the higher likelihood that the candidate will keep his or her political promises to members of their own ethnic community and because communicating with a candidate from one's own community is less expensive, according to the rational choice theory of ethnic bloc voting in a political context (Lander & Copeland 1995, p. 436). Here, it is assumed that voters from a given ethnic group will vote for politicians from that same group more frequently than other voters, especially if that ethnic group is tiny in comparison to other ethnic groups. Although this last idea was put forward by Isiaq, Adebisi, & Bakare (2018) in their work on ethnicity and election outcome.

However, in applying this theory to the context of this study, the South East geo-political zone are known for their zealotness and dedication to business and entrepreneurship. There are a set of self made people, who do not believe that they can achieve anything from the government. An average Igbo person from the southeast is calculative of how much he can gain from the government or the person contesting in an election, if he is to forgo his daily income to go out and vote in an election. Thus, just as Turner (1991) puts the main assumption of the theory based on ones hierarchical preferences, the South East puts their time and business above political values. The South Eastern people do not go out to vote as civic duties, but only when they considered that their votes will make an impact on the political system or when they consider the candidate to make policies that will better the zone. No wonder, in our analysis below, we discovered that voter turnout in the South East in 2019 was poor compare to that of 2015. This may not be unconnected to their expectation during the 2015 election which was not attained, and also the failure of the incumbent government to incorporate the zone into the political stratum of his administration.

CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS OF VOTER APATHY IN NIGERIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS WITH REFERENCE TO SOUTH-EAST, 2015-2019.

The purpose of this conceptual analysis is to show if voter apathy was recorded in the 2015, 2019, and 2023 presidential election and how the voter apathy affected political participation in the South East.

Table 1 2015 presidential election in the South East

Year	States	Registered Voters	Accredited Voters	Total Vote Cast	Diff. b/w Reg. Voters/Acc. Voters	Diff. b/w Acc. Voters/Total Votes
	Enugu	1,381,563	616,112	585,632	765,451	30,480
	Abia	1,349,134	442,538	401,049	906,596	41,489
	Anambra	1,963,427	774,430	703,409	1,188,997	71,021
	Imo	1,747,681	801,712	731,921	945,969	69,791
	Ebonyi	1,071,226	425,301	393,337	645,925	31,964

Source: Compiled by the Author from Okafor *et al* (2022)

The table above shows that in Enugu State, 1,381,565 voters were registered by the INEC, and among the 1,381,565 registered voters only 616,112 were accredited to vote in the 2015 presidential election. This gives a clear indication that 765,451 registered voters did not participate in the 2015 presidential election that gave rise to emergence of Muhammadu Buhari as the president of Nigeria after defeating the incumbent president in 2015. Elections in a state were 765,451 which is almost 1,000,000 registered voters were not accredited to participate, evidently displayed voter apathy. Therefore with this analysis, it is believed that non participation of 765,451 registered voters in 2015 presidential election in Nigeria with reference to Enugu state shows that voter apathy was recorded in Enugu state. In addition to this, the total number of votes cast in Enugu gives 585,632. Therefore, if we subtract the total votes cast which is 585632 from the accredited votes which is 616,112, it gives 30,480 which is the total number of registered and accredited voters who did not vote in the 2015 presidential election in Enugu, the addition of 765,451 voters who did not take part in the accreditation exercise and 30,480 accredited voters but did not vote in the election gives 795,931. This means that a whooping 795,931 people did not participate in the 2015 presidential election in Enugu State. Furthermore, a clear subtraction of 795,931 from 1,381,563 total registered voters gives 585,632 which is the total vote cast in the state. This shows that out of 1,381,563 registered voters in Enugu State in 2015 presidential election, only 585,632 voted in the election while 795,931 people abandoned the election. Evidently, this shows that voter apathy was highly recorded in the 2015 presidential election in Enugu.

Abia state got 1,349,134 registered voters in the 2015 presidential election. Among the 1,349,134 registered voters in Abia state only 442,538 voters took part in the accreditation exercise in 2015 presidential election which shows that 906,596 registered voters did not participate in the accreditation exercise in Abia state. In any presidential election we're 906596 registered voters which is close to 1,000,000 did not get accredited to be able to vote in such an election shows that voter apathy is on the high side in that state as seen in Abia state. Secondly, the total number of vote cast in Abia state gives 401049 votes, therefore, subtracting 401,049 which is the total number of votes from the accredited votes 442,538 gives 41,489, this means that 41,489 registered and accredited voters did not vote in the 2015 presidential election in Abia state. Therefore, the addition of 906596 voters who did not take part in the accreditation exercise and 41,489 accredited voters who did not vote in the election gives 948,085 which means that a whooping 948,085 people did not participate in the 2015 presidential election in Abia State. Furthermore, a clear subtraction of 948,085 from 1,349,134 the total registered voters give 401,049 which is the total vote cast in the state. This means that out of the 1,349,134 total registered voters in Abia, only 401,049 voted in the 2015 presidential election while 948,085 abandoned the election.

The Independent National Electoral Commission "INEC" registered 1,963,427 voters in Anambra State in the 2015 presidential election. The total figure of 774,430 voters were accredited out of the 1,963,427 registered voters which shows that 1,188,997 registered voters did not participate in the accreditation exercise in 2015 presidential election in Anambra State. The non involvement of 1,188,997 registered voters in the accreditation exercise shows that voter apathy was highly recorded in Anambra. Probably, the total figure of 703,409 was recorded as the total number of votes cast in Anambra in the 2015 presidential election, a clear subtraction of 703,409 which is the total number of votes cast in Anambra State from the total number of accredited votes which is 774,430 shows that 71,021 registered and accredited voters did not vote in Anambra 2015 presidential election. The addition of 1,188,997 registered voters but were not accredited and 71,021 accredited voters but did not vote gives a total figure 1,260,018, this means that a whopping 1,260,018 people did not participate in the 2015 presidential election in Anambra. In other words, a clear subtraction of 1,260,018 from 1,963,427 which is the total registered voters gives 703,409 which is the total number of votes cast in the state. This shows that out of 1,963,427 total registered voters in Anambra, only 703,409 people voted in the 2015 presidential election while 1,260,018 people abandoned the election.

Probably, Imo and Ebonyi States also experienced the same voter apathy that existed in Enugu, Abia and Anambra States in the 2015 presidential election that brought Muhammadu Buhari as President of Nigeria. Succinctly, The Independent National Electoral Commission registered 1,747,681 voters in Imo state. Only the total number of 801,712 voters were accredited out of the 1,747,681 registered voters which gives a clear indication that 945,969 registered voters did not participate in the accreditation exercise in 2015 presidential election. The total absence of 945,969 registered voters in the accreditation exercise slaughters democracy because participation in politics is a civic responsibility, a sign of healthy democracy and a best method of ensuring that people's interest are not neglected (Mba, 2007). "The ultimate mission of democracy is to improve the quality of life of the people" (Nnoli, 2011, p. 25). But improvement rarely occurs in a state where citizens who are supposed to perfect the change are apolitical. If a greater number of citizens refuse to come out and vote on the day of election, the few financially influenced ones through balloting will give power to an unpopular leader against the will of the people. The table above records 731,921 as the total votes cast in Imo state. Therefore, a clear subtraction of 731,921 which is the total number of votes in the states from 801,712 accredited voters in Imo gives 69,791 which shows that 69,791 people did not vote in the 2015 presidential election in Imo state. In other words, the addition of 945,969 registered voters but did not involved in the accreditation exercise and 69,791 accredited voters but did not vote gives 1,015,760, this means that total number of 1,015,760 did not participate in the 2015 presidential election in Imo State. Succinctly, a clear subtraction of 1,015,760 from the total registered voters which is 1,747,681 gives 731,921 which is the total votes cast in Imo State. This indicates that out of the 1,747,681 total registered voters in the state, only 731,921 people voted in the 2015 presidential election while 1,015,760 abandoned the election.

The absence or non involvement of a greater number of citizens gives rise to an emergence of a non democratic government. Obiora in Nwankwo (2018) states that lack of popular participation and absence of rule of law characterize non democratic governments. That is to say that one of the reasons a greater number of people do not take part in election is because they have lost confidence in the electoral body which conducts elections in the country especially a country where the psychological value of votes is absolutely low, example, Nigeria.

INEC registered 1,071,226 voters in Ebonyi State in the 2015 presidential election. Out of the total registered voters in the state, only 425,301 voters were accredited in the 2015 presidential election which shows a total non participation of 645,925 registered voters in the accreditation exercise in the election in Ebonyi State. However, a total figure of 393,337 was recorded as the total number of votes cast in Ebonyi

State in the 2015 general election. Statistics has shown that a clear subtraction of 393,337 which is the total vote cast from 425,301 which is the accredited votes shows that 31,964 registered and accredited voters did not participate in the balloting. Therefore, the summation of 645,925 registered voters but did not participate in the accreditation exercise and 31,964 registered and accredited voters but did not vote gives 677,889. This means that a total number of 677,889 people did not participate in the 2015 presidential election in Ebonyi state. Therefore, a clear subtraction of 677,889 from 1,071,226 which is the total registered voters in the state gives 393,337 which is the total votes cast in the state. This shows that out of 1,071,226 registered voters in Ebonyi, only 393,337 voted in the 2015 election while 677,889 people did not participate at all in the election.

This conceptual analysis has shown that South East geopolitical zone recorded voter apathy in the 2015 presidential election that gave rise to emergence of Buhari as president elect after defeating President Jonathan.

Table 2: 2019 Presidential Election Result from South East

Year	States	Registered Voters	Total PVC Collected	Accredited Voters	Total Votes Cast	Uncollected PVC	Diff. b/w Total PVC Collected/Total Votes Cast
2019	Enugu	1,944,016	1,787,537	452,765	451,063	156,479	1,336,474
	Abia	1,932,892	1,729,943	361,561	344,471	202,949	1,385,472
	Anambra	2,447,996	2,071,714	675,273	625,035	376,282	1,446,679
	Imo	2,272,293	1,702,178	585,741	542,777	570,115	1,159,401
	Ebonyi	1,459,933	1,299,048	391,747	379,394	160,885	919,654

Source: Compiled by the Author from Okafor *et al* (2022).

Presidential elections in the South East have been previously marred by voter apathy which has previously impeded political development in the geopolitical zones. Election remains the ultimate means of measuring citizens' preferences over another in a democratic setting. Democratic elections encourage the people's participation in politics while undemocratic elections whittle the psychological value of vote down. "To qualify as democratic, such elections must be able to meet certain conditions of being free and fair" (Nwankwo, 2008, p. 250). Nigeria is an exception because evidence has shown that elections in Nigeria are absolutely undemocratic, marred by riggings, political intimidation and other electoral frauds.

The table above, conceptually analyses the 2019 presidential election in the South East Geopolitical zone. In 2019 presidential election, Enugu State got 1,944,016 registered voters, out of the total number of registered voters in Enugu only 1,787,537 people collected their Permanent Voters cards (PVCs). A clear subtraction of 1,944,016 which is the total registered voters from 1,787,537 which is the number of collected PVCs shows that 156,479 people did not collect their PVCs in Enugu State. In addition to this analysis, it evident that among the 1,787,537 number of those who collected their PVCs, only 451,063 people voted in the presidential election. Therefore, a clear subtraction of the number of PVC collected

and the number of people that voted says that a large number of 1,336,474 people did not vote in Enugu State. This analysis has shown that voter apathy was highly recorded in Enugu State in the 2019 Presidential election.

Participation in politics is a healthy instrument that keeps democracy alive in a country. Refusal to vote is a direct acceptance of any government that comes to power whether undemocratic or unpopular. The total number of 1,932,892 voters was registered in Abia state by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Out of the total registered voters, only 1,729,943 PVCs were collected. The subtraction of 1,932,892 total registered voters from the 1,729,943 PVCs collected gives the total of uncollected PVCs which is 202,949 showing that 202,949 people did not collect their PVCs in Abia state. Furthermore, out of the 1,729,943 people that collected their PVCs in Abia, only 344,471 people voted in the 2019 presidential election in Abia state. Therefore, the difference between the total number of PVC collected and the total votes cast also says that the total number of 1,385,472 people did not vote in Abia state, this automatically shows that apathy was recorded in Abia since 1,385,472 did not participate in the election out of the 1,932,892 registered voters.

In Anambra state, the total number of 2,447,996 voters were registered by INEC prior to 2019 presidential election. Out of the total number of registered voters, only 2,071,714 PVCs were collected. This alone raises every indication that voter apathy was recorded in the state during the 2019 presidential election. Apparently, the difference between the total number of 2,447,996 which is the total registered voters and 2,071,714 which is the total of the collected PVCs gives 376,282 which is the total number of uncollected PVCs signifying that the total number of 376,282 registered voters abandoned their PVCs. Probably, the difference between the total number of votes cast in the election which is 625,035 and the total number of the collected PVCs which is 2,071,714 says that a total number of 1,446,679 voters did not participate in the 2019 presidential election in Anambra state. Therefore, it is crystal clear that the addition of 376,282 total number of the uncollected PVCs and 1,446,679 total number of those who collected PVCs but did not vote says that a whopping 1,822,961 people did participate in the election in Anambra out of the 2,447,996 total number registered voters in the state.

In Imo state, a whopping 2,272,293 voters were registered. Out of the total registered voters only 1,702,178 people collected their PVCs. In every election, the high or low number of PVCs collected does not determine apathy because PVCs have other uses, some also use it for banking purposes. The excessive influx of people into the PVC collection centre prior to election days gives some hope of greater voter participation, but the inability of the same people to turn up due to one reason or the other impedes the electoral process and slaughters democracy. A clear subtraction of the total registered voters from the number of collected PVCs gives the total number of uncollected PVCs which is 570,115 which means that the total of 570,115 registered voters abandoned their PVCs and did not participate in the 2019 presidential election in Imo state. Furthermore, the difference between the total number of votes cast which is 542,777 and the total number collected PVCs which is 1,702,178 says that a whopping number of 1,159,401 registered voters did not participate in the 2019 presidential election in Imo state. Voter apathy is absolutely high in a state that has 2,272,293 registered voters and out of the registered voters 1,159,401 people did not participate in the election as seen in Imo state in the 2019 presidential election.

Lastly, Ebonyi state got a total number of 1,459,933 registered voters in the 2019 presidential election. Out of the whopping number of the total registered voters only 1,299,048 people collected their PVCs prior to the Election Day. Evidence has apparently shown that a clear subtraction of 1,459,933 which is the total number of registered voters from 1,299,048 which is the total number of PVCs collected also gives 160,885 which is the total number of uncollected PVCs, this means that 160,885 people in Ebonyi state did not only abandon their PVCs but also abandoned the election in general. Succinctly, the difference between the total number of vote cast in the election which is 379,394 and the total number of

PVCs collected which is 1299,048 says that a total number of 919,654 people did not participate in the 2019 presidential election which brought president Muhammadu Buhari to power again for the second term. In order words, the addition of 160,885 and 919,654 says that a whopping 1,080,539 people did not participate in the 2019 presidential election in Ebonyi state out of the 1,459,933 total number of people registered in that state.

There was no record of exclusion of the South East from 2009 to 2011 under the administration of President Goodluck Jonathan. That is why the people the South East geopolitical zone participated more under Jonathan's administration than that of Buhari.

The table below shows the South East participation in 2015 presidential election under president Goodluck Jonathan compared to the presidential election of 2019 under President Muhammadu Buhari's administration.

Table3: Comparison of 2015-2019 accredited voters and total votes cast.

YEAR	2015 Accr. Voters	2015 Total Votes	2019 Accr. Votes	2019 Total Votes
ENUGU	616,112	585,632	452,765	451,063
ABIA	442,538	401,049	361,561	344,471
ANAMBRA	774,430	703,409	675,273	625,035
IMO	801,712	731,921	585,741	542,777
EBONYI	425,301	393,337	391,747	379,394
TOTAL	3,060,093	2,815,348	2,467,087	2,342,740

Source: Compiled by the author from table 1 and table 2 above.

WHY THE DROP IN 2019?

The people who are politically repressed, sidelined and excluded may have reasons to be less interested in the political activities of their country. The table below shows the reasons behind the drop in the participation of the South East in 2019 presidential election under President Muhammadu Buhari's administration. The southeast zone was sideline by the government of President Buhari, who never won election in any of the southeast zone both in 2015, and 2019. Ogu, Onyemaobi & Chukwu (2023) noted that, it is a truth that the South-East and South-South did not significantly contribute to the success of the APC during their first and second administrations. This may have contributed to the two regions' exclusion from the party, but it could also be argued that doing so was unfair to the two regions. And since such injustice and unfair treatment are capable of tearing the nation apart, it is understandable why security has gotten worse during the APC government, as has the South-east's demand for a separate Biafran state. In fact in 2019, the Igbos in southeast almost boycotted the general election, because they felt totally marginalized by the incumbent government.

The table {4} below shows the Service Chiefs appointed by President Muhammadu Buhari in 2015 excluding the South East completely.

Table 4: Buhari's 2015 appointed Service Chiefs excluding the South East .

S/N	Names	Positions	States
1	Major General Gabriel Olonishakin	Chief of Defence Staff	Ekiti
2	Major General T.Y Buratai	Chief of Army Staff	Borno
3	Real Admiral Ibok-Eket Ekwe Ibas	Chief of Naval Staff	Cross River
4	Air Vice Marshal Sadique Abubakar	Chief of Air Staff	Bauchi
5	Air Vice Marshal Monday R. Morgan	Chief of Defence Intelligence	Benue
6	Major Gen Babagana Monguno {rtd}	Natonal Security Adviser	Borno

Source: Premium Times, Tuesday, July 13, 2015. Cited in Onyemaobi (2022).

Table 5: Composition of Heads of Frontline Security Agencies in Nigeria under Buhari's Civilian Administration.

c	Ministry/Security Agency	Head	State/Region of Origin
1	Nigeria Army	Tukur Buratai	Borno (North East)
2	Nigeria Air Force	Abubakar Sadiq	Bauchi (North East)
3	Nigeria Navy	Ibok Ekwe Ibas	Cross River (South South)
4	Nigeria Police Force	Ibrahim Idris (2016-2019) Muhammed Adamu (2019 - present)	Niger (North Central)
5	The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission	Ibrahim Magu	Borno (North East)
6	Federal Road Safety Commission	Boboye Oyeyemi	Oyo (South West)
7	Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corp	Abdullahi Muhammadu	Niger (North Central)
8	Nigeria Prisons Service	Ja'Afaru Ahmed	Kebbi (North West)
9	Nigeria Immigration Service	Muhammed Babandede	Jigawa (North West)
10	Nigeria Customs Service	Hameed Ali	
11	National Intelligence Agency	Ayo Oke (2013-2017) Ahmed Rufai Abubakar (2018-present)	Oyo (South West) Katsina (North West)
12	Department of State Services	Lawal Daura (2015-2018)	Katsina (North West) Kano (North West)
13	Office of the National Security Adviser	Babagana Monguno	Borno (North East)
14	Ministry of Interior	Abdulrahman Dambazzau	Kaduna (North West)
15	Ministry of Defence	Mansur Dan Ali	Xamfara (North West)
16	Chief of Defence	Abayomi Olonishakin	Ekiti (South West)

Source: Ibekwe (2015: 59)

The table above shows non inclusion of the South East in the security appointment made by Buhari. "It is preposterous to exclude a significant part of the country from security governance in a society that struggles to integrate itself" (Ibekwe, 2015, p. 59). This reckless exclusion has contributed immensely towards the people's lack of interest in the political activity of the zone, thereby increasing the rate of voter apathy in the South East.

Table 6: 2023 Presidential Election in the South East

States	Total Registered Voters	Accredited Voters	SOURCES	% of Accr. Voter from Reg. Voters
Enugu	2,112,793	482990	https://www.channelstv.com/2023/02/27/2023-elections-peter-obi-wins-enugu/amp/	22.8%
Abia	2,120,808	384,468	https://guardian.ng/news/2023-313ction-obi-wins-in-abia-defeats-tinubu-atiku-kwankwaso/	18.1%
Anambra	2,536,156	628,590	https://punchng.com/nigeriaelections/2023-inec-declares-obi-winner-of-presidential-election-in-anambra/?amp	24.7%
Imo	2,125,446	476,730	https://www.channelstv.com/2023/02/28/2023-elections-obi-records-landslide-victory-in-imo/amp	22.4%
Ebonyi	1,563,529	337887	https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/585326-nigeriadeclares2023-peter-obi-floors-tinubu-atiku-in-ebonyi.html	21.6%

CONCLUSION

This paper discovers that South Eastern people do not participate actively in political elections in Nigeria which encourages high rate of voter apathy in the geopolitical zone. The paper also discovers that the entrepreneurial nature of the South Eastern people as well as their commercial engagements in other business activities is the reason behind their disengagement in political elections in Nigeria. Every effort towards encouraging the active participation of the people of the South East and citizen of Nigerians lies in the Independent national electoral commission (INEC) which has the ultimate power of conducting free and fair election in Nigeria, because if the people's choice is denied, the people's participation in politics is discouraged.

Incontrovertibly, if the promises made to the citizens during campaign are not fulfilled in Nigeria, the promissory value of votes is low and in any country where the promissory value of vote is mostly low, there is every possibility that the citizens of that country will lack the zeal to participate in politics especially voting. For democracy to survive in Nigeria votes must be equal, one man's votes must not weigh more the two million votes of Nigerians, because if such a thing happens, voter apathy looms. One of the ways to encourage active participation of the citizens is ensuring that the value of votes attached in the minds of voters is high, that is assuring the citizens that their votes will make a difference and will change the outcome of the election, any country where citizens believe that their votes will not make a difference, will not count and that they will not influence the outcome of the election, the possibility of them coming out to vote is zero example Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATION

In order to reduce the rate of voter apathy in the South East and increase the level of political development, this paper recommends the following:

1. In order to incur the interest of eligible voters to come out in Election Day to carry out their civic duty. The electoral; umpire (INEC) should strictly adhere to their election principles, that will ensure a

free, credible and transparent election. This can raise the trust of the people towards the responsiveness of the electoral umpire; this is because an irresponsive electoral body cannot be able to gain the trust of the electorates.

2. The government both at the state and federal in particular should ensure that the dividends of democracy reach to every part of the country. This is in support of the idea Okafor *et al* (2022).

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