
FACTORS INFLUENCING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN ELECTION IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

BY

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Abstract

The focus of this research is to identify the factors influencing public participation in election in Cross River State, Nigeria. This concern is in response to global advocacy for the promotion of capitalist development under democratic governance in non- western societies. Accordingly, the theoretical framework is premised on political economy of modernization which reflects the relationship between the infrastructure and superstructure of the society, both of which are characterized by complimentary competition. To carry out this research, five research questions have been raised whose contents constitute the research problems. The scope of the study covers the three senatorial districts of Cross River State. The target population is the total number of registered voters in the study area before the 2019 general elections by Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The sample size derived from six selected local government areas is 400, using Taro Yamane formula. The primary data will be derived mainly from qualitative instruments based on interview schedule and focus group discussion. This strategy is intended to complement the inadequacies inherent in either of them. The Pearson product moment correlation will be used to analyze the data. On the whole, the significance of this study is obvious, judging from the standpoint of electorate and political actors. For the electorate, it will arouse consciousness to partake in voting during election, which is the essence of participatory democracy. On the other hand, it will also create consciousness in political actors to be wary of their actions and inactions whose consequences are tied to voting behavior of the electorate. The outcome of the research showed that all the key variables have significant relationship with public participation in election. It also showed that the Nigerian electorate have become highly literate and conscious of the antics of party politics in Nigeria.

Keywords: Public participation, Election, Cross River State, Nigeria, Political engagement, Voter turnout, Political awareness, Electoral process, Political education, Electoral integrity

1. INTRODUCTION

Background to the study

The global concern today is geared towards the actualization and sustenance of democratic governance which thrives under capitalist economic structures. This is possible because both capitalist production and democratic governance exhibit common features which promote competition. The sustenance of this structure of production and governance is hinged on public participation in election which, Brusky (2019) described as, the essence of democracy. In furtherance of democratic spread across the globe therefore, there is current pressure by Western capitalist powers on countries in Africa, Asia, and Southern America through the instrumentality of the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) to embrace democracy and restructure their economies through the process of deregulation to achieve good governance (Appadorai, 1998).

The main attractions of democratic governance are the promotion of fundamental human rights which include equity, social justices, and above all, public participation in elections. These attractions partly influenced human rights and political activists who clamored for structural changes in their various societies in the past. The outcome of these actions led to the collapse of the Berlin wall and subsequent re-unification of Germany, the disintegration of the defunct Soviet Union and the fall of Communism in China. In view of this, advocates of human rights consider democracy to be superior to other forms of government because it secures the rights and interests of every person from being disregarded. Explaining further, (Mbachu 1998:81), sees democracy as “a way of life evolving from the choice of what one does where he lives, how he organizes his family, religion, his political life, and how to own property” etc. The awareness of these features and commitment to civic responsibility tend to influence voting behaviour among electorate. In other words, democracy can be used as a tool to attain and improved quality of life of individuals and sustainable development.

Public awareness of the relevance of participation in election is created through informal and formal approaches. These include cultural orientation, political education, or political socialization. Cultural orientation is provided in the family as part of the process of socialization of children to prepare them for adult life. According to Anifowose and Enemu (1999), political socialization refers to the ways society transmit its political culture from generation to generation: they further explained that, the agents of political socialization include: the family, school, peer groups and the mass media. Political education on the other hand refers to the strengthening of fundamental liberal democratic value awareness in the society: (Suter, 1999). He also added that, “the main aim of political education is to get people interested in politics and lay down information which will allow pupils and student to become responsible citizens, by attempting to teach them how to analyses and assess a given political situation independently. This approach exposes the public to the understanding of the tenets of democracy and the essence of public participation in the process of selecting political leaders via election. It can also be argued that, public attitudes to all societal issues (including voting in election), essentially exhibit their disposition, which could be negative or positive. This is due largely to the variability of human behaviour in which compliance to norms and values by members is not automatic. With respect to voting, some may decline based on personal reasons, while others may argue that it is not compulsory by law. However, it is the responsibility of government and other social institutions to arouse consciousness in the citizens through orientation programme to be responsive to their civic duties, which include voting in election.

In Britain, a combination of monarchy rooted in religious doctrine of Anglican Church and parliamentary system of government, with clearly defined functions is an age-old practice which is highly respected by the population has analyzed the factors which influence public participation in election in Britain to include, political ideology, personal integrity and capability of the political actors (Denver, 1994). Here, the dominant ideologies are conservatism and welfarism, both of which are hinged on capitalism. Also, McKay (1982) identified ideological differences, disillusionment and lack of interest in the electorates as likely factors which promote voter apathy. In the United States Of America (U.S.A) which is acclaimed to be “the milting pot of multi-racial and multi-ethnic nationalities”, the tenets of democracy here are highly revered and voting in election is regarded as an essential duty for all citizens (Sikri & Nirmalendu 2017, Das 2015).

In different parts of Africa, public participation in election is influenced by a combination of historical antecedent based on colonialism and military intervention in open politics. Other related factors which influence public participation in election are, collective memory of historical and contemporary events, patterns of trust, political engagement and disengagement at individual, group and regional levels (Egobueze & Ojirika, 2015).

In Nigeria, (including the study area) public participation in elections has also been disrupted by military intervention in open politics. The impact of the long stay of the military in power is manifest in unorthodox behaviour of political actors. Here, primordial sentiments based on ethnic, regional or religious factors tend to predominate. These factors tend to promote mistrust in the public perception of the politics in governance as well as the declared intentions of the political parties as contained in their manifestoes. The public impression of politics is that, corruption tends to pervade the entire spectrum of government. This is reflected in appointment, allocation of government projects, award of contracts and the electoral process. Public office holders are perceived as self-seeking opportunists who corruptly enrich themselves and display their ill-gotten wealth recklessly. In view of this, the electorate feel justified to demand for inducement in cash or kind to motivate them to vote during election.

Cross River State, which is the focus of this study, is a sub-unit of the Nigerian federation. It was part of the defunct Eastern Region in the first republic, which was split into three states by the military government under Gen. Yakubu Gowon on May 27th, 1967. This action was designed to appease the agitators for the creation of Calabar, Ogoja, Rivers State movement whose population his predominantly multi-ethnic with differentiated linguistic and cultural practices. This development turned away their loyalty from the secessionist Republic of Biafra and subsequent civil war. The apathy towards Igbo leadership continued in the second republic when the people opted to vote for National Party of Nigeria instead of Nigeria Peoples Party. The latter was perceived to be an upshot of NCNC which was accused of marginalizing non-Igbo speaking areas of the region in the first republic. Within the state, mutual suspicion and discrimination as well as inter-communal clashes over land and chieftaincy appointments are common. The aftermath of such clashes generate bitterness which is extended to the political domain. This is noticeable in the process of nomination and election of candidates. There is evidence from polling data that communal identities are sharpened during elections... (Orji 2013). This scenario is presumed to have implications on voting behaviour of the electorates. Stereo-type attitude is also rife among different cultural groups. This attitude beclouds the quality of candidates to be voted for in elections.

From the discourse so far, it can be observed that public participation in election varies from place to place. In the western world where people are sufficiently enlightened,

public participation in election is motivated by personal initiative in response to civic responsibility. In non-western societies (including the study area), the motivating factors tend to be unpredictable. At the same time, it can also be observed that the prize for political office in Nigeria is rated so high and the democratic institutions are so weak that political competition is fierce, and sometimes violent. In the course of this study attempts will be made to unravel the possible factors influencing public participation election in study area, which is a sub-unit Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem:

The research problems for this study are provoked by growing decline of public participation in the electoral process in Cross River State in particular and Nigeria as a whole (www.PremiumTimesNg.com 2019, independent National electoral commission <https://www.inecnigeria.com.org>, 2011, 2015, 2019 & 2023). Judging from the global concern for the promotion of democratic governance across the world, this scenario is not in consonance with the essence of participatory democracy in which political leadership of a given country is selected via election. (Bamgbose, 2005, and Brusky 2019). In his contribution, Akinyemi (2019), further explained that, only a small percentage of the voting population have actually been voting during every election since (1999). He described voter apathy as "...an affront to the ideal of majority rule which is one of the basic tenets of democracy". The issues involved in this context cut across socio-cultural, economic and political dimensions. These have been discussed variously by scholars and political activists (Denver 1994, MC Greal 2017, Egobueze & Ojirika 2017, Sikri & Nirmalendu 2017, Das 2015 etc).

Judging from a number of similar studies carried out elsewhere such as America, Britain and India, their emphasis was more on statistical decline in election results, without recourse to factors that are responsible (Sikri & Nirmalendu 2017). In another research on; "Voter Apathy in Nigeria in the 2015 general elections", Fagunwa (2019), examined four major factors which constitute the causes of Apathy world-wide. These include; contextual, systematic, individual and social factors. In particular, he identified systematic and contextual factors as peculiar to Nigeria. His conclusion was limited to the outcome of the 2015 general election in Nigeria. This however was not comprehensive enough because it was limited to decline in voting pattern. More importantly too, it did not reflect the essential factors which influence people to vote or not. Also from available literature, there is no other known research on this topic from the study area. In view of this, the researcher has decided to investigate the growing decline of public participation in the electoral process in Cross River State, Nigeria since 2011, (National Directorate of Statistics, 2019, INEC 2011, 2015 & 2019).

The research problem is anchored on five research questions whose components constitute the variable scope. These include; causative factors, awareness of participatory democracy, image of political actors and electoral process, primordial sentiments expressed in ethnicity, religious persuasion and regional politics as well as the state of voter education. Apparently, the contribution of the outcome of this study to knowledge is not in doubt. First, it is intended to expose the character of public perception of the essence of democracy, which is manifest in participation in election. Secondly, the result obtained from the study can also serve as "feedback mechanism" for those in governance to be wary of their actions and in-actions, whose consequences have direct bearing on public interest with respect to participation in election.

Research Questions

To carry out this study, five research questions concerning the factors influencing public participation in election in Cross River State were raised: They are:

1. What are the factors that influence public participation in elections in Cross River State?
2. In what ways does the awareness of the concept of participatory democracy influence public participation in election?
3. How does the image of political actors and the electoral process influence participation in election?
4. How does ethnicity and religion influence public participation in election?
5. How does voter education influence public participation in election?

Scope of the study

The scope of this study can be examined in three ways. Spatially, this study is designed to cover the entire Cross River State of Nigeria. This is because the issue at stake embraces the entire state, which is a sub-unit of the Nigerian federation. However, the sample population derives from eligible voters from six selected local government areas with urban status in the three senatorial districts of Cross River State. Each of these districts comprises several indigenous populations as well as “stranger” element” from other parts of the country. The target population is not limited to indigenes of the state. The State has a total of 18 Local Government Areas, which stretches from Mangrove Swamp Forest in the South, followed by Rain Forest in the Central District, to Guinea Savannah in the Northern District. The States has many streams and Rivers, the biggest of which is Cross River, from which the State derives its name. The landscape ranges from lowland in the coastal areas in the South, to highlands and valleys in parts of Central and Northern Districts. The highest of these is a plateau popularly known as, “Obudu Ranch Resort”.

The variable scope of the study covers the essential components of the objectives. This includes factors influencing public participation in election, awareness of the concept of participatory democracy, primordial sentiments expressed in ethno-cultural and religious issues, perception of political actors and their influence on the electoral process, and voter education. Also, the study will make use of primary and secondary data. The primary data will be obtained from the respondents while the secondary data (E.g. General election results from INEC) and all cited works used are obtained from public libraries and internet.

FACTORS INFLUENCING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN ELECTION

Apart from any official regulation, public participation in electoral process varies from place to place. In view of this, many scholars have expressed various views concerning the factors which motivate the electorate to vote or not during any election. This is significant because the success of democracy largely depends upon the participation of people in the election. It is common knowledge that eligible voters respond variously in their participation in the electoral process. Some register, but do not collect their voter’s card, while others do collect their voter’s card but decline to vote during election. Yet, others vote selectively (e.g. Presidential and National Assembly elections) and decline to vote in other elections. This trend contradicts the tenets of democracy according to (Wanaye 2014). In his view, electorates are expected to vote in all elections. To him, this is more rewarding than to vote selectively. In his words, “many people think that Presidential elections are the only

important elections in the world. Millions of people turn out to vote in Presidential elections but do not ordinarily vote in other elections”. What is even more frustrating is that even when people vote in these Presidential elections, they forget to vote on many ballot proposals that will affect their everyday lives, more so than what the President proposes to parliament”. The author is also concerned about negative impression of politics, by the public. For instance, the notion that all politicians are liars or to be a politician you have to be a liar, tell a lie or believe in lies. In his opinion, this is not necessarily true. However he acknowledges the fact that many politicians and candidates shamefully distort the truth in order to get elected to office. This negative perception of political actors tends to discourage people from voting during election.

In an analysis of voting behaviour of electorates in Britain from 1945 to date, Denver (1994) observed that, voting behaviour is correlated with the following social variables: age, gender, region, religion and ethnicity. These factors are significant in plural societies. Britain for instance, is composed of four ethnic Nationalities (i.e. England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland) as well as several migrants from Africa, Asia and Southern America. It was important to identify the impact of primordial sentiments on the voting behaviour of the electorate. The relationship between these variables and social classes was also measured, alongside party ideological identification. Based on prediction for the outcome of elections, working class voters and middle class voters were expected to vote mainly for the Labour and Conservative parties respectively because of their vested interests. Elsewhere in Europe, Mcgreal (2017) is of the view that the reasons associated with political apathy are many and varied. These range from ideological differences to disillusionment and lack of interest of the electorates. Others are alienation, ignorance, mistrust and lack of understanding of the real essence of voting during elections.

In another research on Public participation in election in Nigeria in the 2015 general elections, (Fagunwa 2019), examined four major factors which constitute the causes of Apathy world-wild. These include; contextual, systematic, individual and social factors. In particular, he identified systematic and contextual factors as peculiar to Nigeria. This conclusion was limited to the outcome of the 2015 general elections.

Voter Apathy refers to feelings of disillusionment or disenchantment expressed by eligible voters during elections. This phenomenon which manifests in low turn -out of voters during election is a serious threat to democratic governance. In view of this; Ngewana (2019) suggested that, “democracy is a fragile thing. We need to protect it or we risk losing it. What this means is that, voter apathy in any polity should be averted. The argument here is that, where voter apathy occurs, those eventually elected into different positions do not essentially represent the interest and aspirations of the greater majority of eligible voters.

In a study of voter apathy in America, Das (2017), (Sikri & Nirmalendu 2017) where of the view that, “Election lies at the heart of every democratic process”. In view of this every effort directed at arousing the interest of the citizenry needs to be made by the governing authorities to avert voter apathy.

In 2014, the centre for the study of the American electorate (CSAE), a nonpartisan research group, performed an analysis of 25 states’ primary elections. As both governors and senators were running for office, local and national issues were represented. According to the analysis, just three of the 25 states experienced greater voter turnout in 2014 than they did in 2010. Nationally, only 14. 8% of eligible voters participated in state-wide primaries in 2014,

a 3. 5% decrease from the 18. 3% of eligible voters who participated in state-wide primaries in 2010. A little over 17% of both democrat and republican voters turned out for the primaries in 2014. This figure represented a 54% reduction in the number of eligible voters who participated in the primaries 1966, which in that years, stood at 31. 9%.

The report shown above reflects the growing trend in voter apathy in United States of America (USA). The percentage of Americans eligible to vote and who actually voted was 63% in 1960, but has continued to fall since then. One major factor associated with low turnout of voters during election is racism which was contested by civil rights movement. Those that were particularly marginalized were black Americans and Indians. With the resolution of associated issues, in responds to mounting pressure by human rights activists, both Native American Indians as well as new migrants from Africa, Asia, and Southern America who have been granted citizenship are now privileged to contest for varying offices in the United States of America. The climax of this was the emergence of Barak Obama as the first black America president in 2008, who ruled for two tenures.

In India, the responds of the electorates towards democratic governance has been in consistent form independence to date. First, the people were introduced to a political system that was completely alien to their culture. This was further compounded by the state of illiteracy in the country. For instance, as many as 1,635,000 votes were declared invalid in the first election of 1952. This was because many illiterate voters left the ballot papers over time. Worthy of note is the parliamentary election of 1984, in which the voter participation was the highest, being 64%. A recent report reveals that the voter participation in some provinces has reached 70%. But the overall figure is not at all sufficient when compared with the 80 to 90 percent polling in Western Countries.

In non-western societies (including the study area which is a sub-unit of Nigeria), the key issues involved in partisan politics include; perception of the functions of governmental institutions such as the electoral body, security agencies, media houses and the judiciary. Others also include primordial sentiments expressed in cultural, religious and political orientation as well as exposure to media publications. Public critique of all governmental institutions and their functionaries is anchored on the existence or absence of equity and social justices. And understanding of this concept is provided by the prevailing political culture. Unfortunately, public attitude towards democratic governance appears to be influenced by the character of human relations among the diverse ethno-cultural and religious groups. (According to Egobueze & Ojirika 2017), other related factors which influence voting behaviour in Nigeria and other African countries are, collective memory of historical and contemporary events patterns of trust, political engagement and disengagement at individuals group and regional levels. The list also include, mistrust ignorance and the unwholesome practice of vote buying. Mistrust and ignorance are tied to political alienation which discourages people from identifying with partisan politics. They may even develop a sense of anomie, which is a feeling of personal ineffectiveness and divorce from the society.

(Obboh 2017) in his study of ethnic politics, identified the significance of primordial sentiments expressed in ethnicity/religious variables, as major causes of voter apathy during elections in Nigeria. These sentiments are reflected in the voting pattern of electorates during elections.

According to; (Obboh, 2017, Ake, 1996) ethnic chauvinisms and differences in religious persuasion have played significant role in matters of national politics in Nigeria from the past

to the present. This situation has continued to persist because the process of evolution of Nigeria as a single political entity has not yet been fully embraced by the various ethnic nationalities in the country. It appears, each ethno-political sub-unit still holds strongly to its individual identity. This behaviour is complimented by the character of political actors. This view is shared by Ake (1996) who posited that African elites are not so much in support of democracy as using it to acquire political power, but merely preferred to be called democrats than suffer the inconveniences of practicing it.

Another related factor is electoral violence. According to Albert (2007), electoral violence involves all forms of organized acts of threats aimed at intimidating, harming, blackmailing a political stakeholder or opponent before, during and after an election with an intention to determine, delay or influence a political process. The list also includes; ballot box snatching, looting, arson, thuggery, kidnapping (spontaneous or not) which occur before, during and after elections.

In his contribution, Akinyemi (2019) explained that, since her return to electoral democracy in 1999, Nigeria's elections have been characterized by voter apathy. He further explained that, only a small percentage of the voting population actually votes during every election. Indeed, this attitude is an affront to the ideal of 'majority rule' which is one of the basic tenets of democracy. The implication here is that, instead of majority rule, the election results over the years reflect minority rule in Nigeria. For instance, in the study area which is Cross River state, low turn- out of voters in the last three general elections in Nigeria has been consistent. In the 2011 governorship elections, out of 726,341 registered voters, only 114, 8486 voted. In the 2015 edition, 1,175,623 registered, but only 443,231 or 45.05% voted. In the 2019 edition, 82. 3 million registered voters was collated by the Independent National Electoral Commission before the 2019 general elections. Of this number, only 28.6 million voted in the 2019 elections, which is about 35% of the registered voters. In his words, "the voter apathy situation becomes direr when you consider the numbers that voted for the top two Presidential candidates- Muhammadu Buhari & Atiku Abubakar, of the 28.6 million that voted, President Muhammadu Buhari of APC, got 15,191,1847 votes to beat his closest rival, Atiku Abubakar of PDP who polled 11,262,978 votes". Judging from the percentage of the registered voters, Buhari and Atiku were elected by a paltry 18.5% and 13.7% of the total registered voters respectively. The question now is: Does the victory of President Buhari who scored 15 million votes represent the opinion of the majority of the registered voters?

In comparism with previous elections, the 2019 presidential elections recorded the lowest voter's turnout since 1999, (i.e. 35.66% of registered voters which determined the outcome of the elections). In simple terms, it means those that failed to vote tacitly transferred their voting rights to the few that voted and empowered them to make elective decision on their behalf. In previous elections from independence, it can be observed that, the voting pattern of electorates across the country during elections has always been highly influenced by the character of party politics. To illustrate this, in both the first and second republics, the voting pattern by the electorates was dominated by primordial sentiments springing from ethnicity. In northern Nigeria, such sentiments were embodied in religious overtone. People from the power base of the different political parties perceived political contest as a straight fight between "Us versus them" (Orji 2009, Orji 2013). This state of affairs was replicated in the conduct of the 2015 presidential election, in which President Jonathan of PDP won majority of his votes from the South-east and South-south geo-political zones, while Muhammadu Buhari won in the north and South- west, because of the alliance of the two regions. Similarly, the turnout of voters in the 2015 Presidential election was low.

For instance, out of 68,833,476 registered voters, only 29,432,083 or 33.53% voted (NDS, 2019). Apparently, the discouraging attitude inherent in voter apathy is inhibitive to democracy because the sustenance of democratic Governance is hinged on public participation. In a situation like this, people who do not have close attachment to any electoral candidates may tend to shy away from voting. This is an implication of voter apathy.

From the foregoing, the factors associated with public participation in election cited in similar studies have been highlighted. These include; ideological differences, disillusionment and lack of interest of the electorates. Others also include collective memory of historical and contemporary events which are tied to primordial sentiments, patterns of trust, political engagement and disengagement at individual or group level, as well as ignorance and the unwholesome practice of vote buying. Mistrust and ignorance are tied to political alienation which discourages people from identifying with partisan politics. These issues and more will be unraveled in the course of this study.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

The theoretical frame work for this study is premised on classical and neo-classical approaches to the process of modernization. This focus is considered to be appropriate in view of the dynamics of the human society. Historically, modernization theory fundamentally owes its origin to the ideas of a German sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920), regarding the role of rationality and irrationality in the transition from traditional to modern society. Weber's approach provided the basis for the modernization paradigm and deriving from it is the work of Jeffrey Alexander (1994). This American sociologist (Alexander, 1994), outlined the phases of modernization in his essay, “Modern, Anti, post and Neo”. He identified four stages of modernization which took place in the 20th century, stretching from 1960s-1990s.

In their analysis of modernization models, (Zapf 1969: 23 and (Berger 1966:53) observed that, one popular model combines political development, which focuses on the state and nation building, with participation in the democratic process and economic production, aimed at re-distribution of goods and services, leading to national economic growth and social mobilization. Also included are cultural rationalization, Psychic mobilization and international transformation. The latter led to the upsurge in globalization, which is a new dawn in international relations. According to him, “early modernization theory reconstructed western development and its liberal belief of gradual progress, and the universalization of American values which were projected world-wide, especially on the developing countries” with respect to the latter, the process of modernization is spread through emulation, superimposition and diffusion: (details below).

In emulation model, “a pattern of governance, economic structure behavior, education and lifestyle of one country designed for its citizens is copied by another country. Experience so far shows that emulation of foreign values and institutions by non-western societies has not automatically changed the status of the latter to become modernized. The much it does is to enrich the traditional culture with elements of foreign culture. In the superimposition model, “this supposedly superior culture is superimposed on another, probably an inferior culture”. Superimposition results in emergence of a semi-developmental buffer culture belonging to neo-culture model. What obtains here is interplay of specific contact forces; races, prejudices, political and economic imperialism, relative deprivation, segregation, class struggle, safeguarding of foreign standard of living, others also include, the

follower country's reactions to it in the form of nationalist movement, rioting and even war (Ekuronwa, 1995).

The third model is diffusion. This involves the diffusion of ideas, skills and capital in form of aids from the western industrialized societies to the under-developed countries of the world with the intention of using these to develop their societies. This model was applied by the western capitalist powers on non-western societies through the processes of imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism and has continued to attain greater height under globalization. The critique to this model is that it does more harm than the good that it is designed for. This approach ignores the potentials inherent in the "backward" societies which are capable of moving the society forward in the course of development. The mode does not encourage internal development originating from the initiative of the people. Instead it recommends transfer of technology from Western Europe to the "backward" societies.

From the classical analysis, in a modern polity, the structure of production and distribution of goods and services is dominated by private enterprise which also promotes free market economy. This structure also shapes the character of the polity. Whereby different political parties and their candidates compete for votes during election. Also, the system of governance is predicated on the supremacy of the rule of law, equity and social justice. It provides for majority rule. Here, the policy that attracts the support of the majority becomes the official policy. The system also acknowledges the right of all citizens to dissenting views (e.g. the right to contrary opinion over political issues, refusal to register as a voter or to vote during elections). It provides for social integration of all the components units into a common whole. This makes possible a widespread habit of tolerance or accommodation of differences over issues and policies. Awareness of the structure of both the economy and polity is created in the citizenry through informal and formal approaches. This helps to promote National Consciousness and commitment to National issues, including voting during election. More importantly too, this system of government (otherwise referred to as, democracy) provides the norms for political participation which enables the individual to be lifted above the narrow circle of his egoism and primordial sentiments, and broadens his interest. This tendency erodes sectional identity and eliminates primordial sentiments based on ethnicity, race or creed. When this happens, it re-shapes the character of the individual who now becomes interested in his country and develops a sense of patriotism or national responsibility. A true democratic environment further encourages self-realization. Power is dispersed through many hands and public officers are subjected to regular changes according to the will of the majority. This is based on public participation in election (Diamond, Fisk and Garfinkel, 2001). Such elections are expected to be free, fair and credible, depicting electoral integrity, which indeed, cannot be achieved by sudden flight. Its success requires the co-operation of political actors and their supporters with government law enforcement agencies as well as the legal institution. These mechanisms make it possible to monitor actions of the electoral administration; ensure oversight of the electoral process by other government sectors or agencies as well as civil society, and the media. It also provides for enforcement of electoral rules and regulations through administrative or legal means. This is because; consistent legitimate electoral standards and practices help to detect errors, prevent electoral improprieties and illegalities, and ensure integrity (Kofi Annan Foundation, 2012).

Judging from the perspectives discussed above, modernization theory attempts to identify the social variables that contribute to social progress in every society. Proponents of modernization theory claim that modern states are wealthier and more powerful and that their citizens are freer to enjoy a higher standard of living. Aspects of developments such as new

data technology and modern methods of transport, communication and production, apparently make modernization necessary or at least preferable to the status quo. This claim is undeniably realistic to the point that, it makes critique difficult since it implies that such developments control the limits of human interaction, not vice versa. Yet, seemingly paradoxically, it also implies that human agency controls the speed and severity of modernization. As modernization takes whole on traditional societies, it alters a system of thought and cultural orientation. It also introduces new system of production and distribution of goods and services as well as new forms of governance dictated by abstract principles. In Nigeria for instance where the study area is situated, European imperialism introduced western education, health-care and Christian religion which transformed the system of thoughts of the people to embrace science and technology. A new political system based on Bureaucratic Administration as well as the production of raw materials to feed European industries where also introduced. It is therefore not surprising that, with the benefit of hindsight that is advantaged by cumulative research, we find classical modernization theory unsatisfactory due to its Western bias, capitalist ideological underpinnings, and an overall social Darwinism in its logic. The most troubling thought is that, it displays a poor understanding of the socio-economic development process, especially when it comes to issues such as economic sustainability, political freedoms, and social emancipation. Empirically too, the Logic of classical modernization theory has been shown to be unsophisticated at best and expressly erroneous at worst. So, there is a strong case to be made for arguing that, in fact, modernization theory is extinct and hardly deserves any intention to be devoted to it in this thesis. This controversy necessitates the exploration of alternative new trends in modernization theory.

The alternative to be considered here is neo-modernization or post-modernization. In the post-modernization era, attempts are made to re-construct liberal modernization theory as well as the Marxist alternative view. Essentially, Post-Modernism argues that both liberal modernization and its Marxist radical alternatives are outdated and tries to substitute them with multiple cultural and constructivist contingency theories. This theory evolved from the breakdown of communism in China and defunct Soviets Union as well as successful records of some Asian and South American countries which are now flourishing under the sphere of capitalism. Attention by the world capitalist powers is now being turned towards the pre-conditions and achievement of democracy and market economy. This is referred to as, ‘‘Neo-Modernism’’, By (Jeffrey Alexander, Edward Tiryakian, and Wolfgang Zapf). Neo-modernism or Modernization is hinged on democratic governance and free market economic development. This doctrine has no bearing with convergence to western cultural patterns and does not under-estimate nationalist and fundamentalist counter movements. The theory has being summarized as follows:

1. Modernization is the result of actions by individuals and collective, not an automatic development of systems.
2. They seek new ways to achieve their goal and fulfil their values; but whether these aims can be accomplished, depend on their resources.
3. Neo-Modernization is not a consensual process, but competition between modernizes, conservatives and bystanders.
4. Science is a major driving force, but religion and cultural traditions must not be underestimated.
5. The general criterion for success of modernization is welfare development of the whole population.
6. Centres of modernization may change and move.

7. Modernization is not continuous or linear; it also has cycles and regressive crisis (Tiryakian 1998).

The attributes illustrated above are similar to the conception of structured dialectical theory, which expresses the relationship between the economic structure and political structure. Structured dialectical theory incorporates historical materialism and dialectical materialism to explain the causative factors of modernization or social change. According to (Idyorough 2015), “This theory can be defined as a way of explaining social phenomenon in terms of a number of factors interacting and contributing concurrently or consecutively with the economic factor preponderating over all other factors to cause significant alterations in the social structure of a society over a period of time”. The implication here is that one single factor alone is not adequate to explain social phenomenon. Rather, a multiplicity of factors are involved which interact with one another to determine the nature of that phenomenon. Of these multiple factors, the economic base is preponderant over all other social institutions. Apparently, they theory recognizes the fact that one factor alone could be necessary but not sufficient in the explanation of a social phenomenon, therefore there has to be a combination of factors coming together consecutively or concurrently to provide a necessary and sufficient explanation of any social phenomenon. This assertion is in line with (Coulson and Riddell 1980) who identified multiple factors which gives rise to social change. These include:

1. By pressure from representatives of an outside society. This source of change may also be called external pressure.
2. By necessity as a result of natural events which cannot be controlled by the groups.”
3. By mutual agreement of the groups.” This does not mean that both groups must anticipate mutual benefit.
4. The use by the dominant group of its superior structural position to impose change on the subordinate group.
5. The reaction by the subordinate group to its inferior position in relation to the other group (in Idyorough, 2015).

With respect to the study area (Cross River State), which is a sub-unit of the Nigerian Federation, the process of development from the past to the present has been fashioned within the confines of modernization theory. The foundation for this structure was laid during the colonial epoch. Under the pretext that, the implantation of capitalist structure in a multi-ethnic society was consistent with plural democracy which involves competition by varying political parties at the polls (Akeh, 2005). This started with the adoption of mixed economy at independence, which involved the participation of government alongside the private sector in the development of the economy. Over the years, the policy of mixed economy has been deregulated, aimed at disengaging direct involvement of government in economic production in response to global pressure. By implication, this new approach is shifting the attention of government from welfarism to modern capitalism. The prevailing economic structure is described by critics as “cleptocracy” or, “underdeveloped capitalism”. Under this structure, some privileged individuals corruptly enrich themselves through tactful manipulation in governance or administration to emerge as the dominant class. This atmosphere has serious implications on public participation in the electoral process. According to (Akeh, 2005), in so far there is economic inequality in the society, that society cannot have political democracy because political power tend to polarize around economic power. Also a society where a high degree of economic inequality exists, it must necessarily be repressive. This repression arises from the need to curb the inevitable demands of the “have-nots” for redistribution. Unfortunately, the overwhelming influence of ethno-religious affiliation tends to blur public perception of the essence of voting. (Akeh, 2005) is of the view that, “in the case of tribalism

traditional treatments have failed to grasp it fully because they have regarded it merely as consciousness in material condition. Thus they failed to take advantage of the obvious and important fact that tribalism flourishes mainly because it is useful, especially in the economic sense. It provides access to important people, for villagers and unemployed, seeking for jobs in the cities''. In this atmosphere, the relevance of the integrity of candidates for election is played down. The implication here is that, the Nigerian society still remains largely divided by ethnic and religious persuasions with political overtone. This state of affairs creates lack of commitment to National consciousness, National Unity and National goals.

The features displayed above are pointers to the fact that, wholesale adoption of classical modernization paradigm by non-western societies without recourse to local peculiarities is not feasible. This explains why there are manifold socio-cultural, economic and political problems in such countries. The scenario can be explained within the context of multiple causation factors which are inherent in neo-classical modernization model. This theory accommodates socio-cultural, economic and political peculiarities of different countries. In response to global advocacy for democratic governance under capitalist structure, Nigeria can adopt the strategy of thinking globally and acting locally. What this means is that, Nigeria can adapt global developmental standards to suite local needs.

METHODOLOGY

Research design:

For purpose of this study, survey design was adopted. This choice is consistent with Olumolaye (1986), who defined the concept as "A collection of samples of opinions, attitudes or feelings in order to estimate the total or overall situation". Survey was therefore considered to be appropriate in this study in view of the magnitude of the subject matter which embraces the totality of Cross River State. On this basis, the present research on factors influencing public participation in election was carried out. Using a selected sample from the three senatorial districts of the State. Also, the choice of the research area, with complex ethno-cultural and social diversities was considered appropriate to sample public opinion on the research variables, whose outcome can be generalized for the entire state and the country at large.

In carrying out this research, multiple approaches have been applied in both the review of literature and the theoretical frame work. This is also prominent in methodology. Specifically, this approach has been applied in the sampling technique, instrumentation, and data collection procedure and data analysis. The instruments for data collection are qualitative, derived from in-depth interview and focused group discussion.

Sampling technique:

Multiple sampling techniques were used for this study. First, the study adopted purposive/judgmental sampling technique to select the sampling frame and the sample size from each of the six selected Local Government Areas with urban status. These are Calabar South, Calabar Municipality, Yakurr, Ikom, Ogoja and Obudu. Also, clustered sampling technique was adopted because the total population was large enough to be segmented into rural/ urban, indigenous/ non- indigenous, gender and age whereby selection of the sample size was made. The stratified random sampling technique was used to select the sample size; this was based on literate, non-literate, urban and rural strata, from the selected Local Government Areas. Accidental sampling technique was used to select the sampled Elements.

Instruments for data collection:

Two basic instruments were designed to extract responses from the public. These were in-depth interview guide and selected topics for focus group discussion.

The in-depth interview guide was divided into two (2) major sections. The first section covers the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. These include age, gender, educational qualifications and voter registration status. The other section has a total of 32 items. It is sub-divided into four units (eight for each sub-unit), all of which cover the variable scope reflecting the objectives of the study. These include; public awareness of the essence of participatory democracy, factors that provoke voter apathy, Image of political actors and the electoral process, impact of voter education and primordial sentiments. The in-depth interview instrument is open-ended, which requires the respondents to fill in their opinions. The items for the interview guide were read out or interpreted to prospective respondents to avert misinterpretation of spurious responses.

Method of data collection:

After mass-producing copies of the instruments, six research assistants were appointed to help in the distribution of the instruments from each of the six selected Local Government Areas of the State. (Details below);

(a) IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW

From the sample size, persons holding the following important positions in the study sites were selected for the in-depth interview:

1. The district or village head
2. Councilor or ward political leaders
3. The headmaster/headmistress
4. Christian religious leaders
5. Moslem religious leaders
6. Leaders of student's association
7. Leaders of a security outfit
8. Leaders of trader's association
9. Leaders of an indigenous cultural association
10. Leaders of a non-indigenous cultural association

In each of the 12 sites, persons who hold the important positions in the community were identified, contacted and in-depth interview sessions held with them. Thus there were 10 persons X 12 sessions making 120 persons.

(b) Focus Group Discussion

Focus group discussion was held in all the 3 Senatorial districts of the state. Two (2) local government areas were selected in each Senatorial District; making a total of 6 sites in the state. Participants for focus group discussion groups were categorized on the basis of age, gender and education. The age category was further divided into young and adult, and gender was broken into male and female, while education was broken into non-literate and literate. This is illustrated as shown below:

Gender	Male				Female			
Age	Young (18 to 40 years)		Adult (41 to 70 years)		Young (18 to 40 years)		Adult (41 to 70 years)	
Education	Non-Literate	Literate	Non-Literate	Literate	Non-Literate	Literate	Non-Literate	Literate

Participants in the focus group discussion will not be part of sample size. Each focus group discussion was composed a minimum of 6 and a maximum of 10 participants.

Two FGDs were conducted in each of the 6 sites; thus having 12 FGDs to be broken into the following categories:

Senatorial District	Local Government Area	Gender	Age	Education	Number of Discussion
Cross River South	Calabar South	Male	Young	Literate	6 to 10
		Female	Young	Literate	6 to 10
	Calabar Municipality	Male	Adult	Literate	6 to 10
		Female	Adult	Literate	6 to 10
Cross River Central	Yakurr	Male	Young	Non-Literate	6 to 10
		Female	Young	Non-Literate	6 to 10
	Ikom	Male	Adult	Non-Literate	6 to 10
		Female	Adult	Non-Literate	6 to 10
Cross River North	Ogoja	Male	Young	Literate	6 to 10
		Female	Young	Non-Literate	6 to 10
	Obudu	Male	Adult	Literate	6 to 10
		Female	Adult	Non-Literate	6 to 10
Total					72 to 120

In all, 12 FGDs were conducted involving about 72 to 120 discussants.

Method of Data Analysis

Concept classification based on research questions and analysis of their contents was adopted for this research. This is consistent with the analysis of qualitative data. Accordingly, the demographic characteristics of the respondent were described using nominal scales. The summary of the responses were categorized and classified according to the research questions and objectives, and followed by content analysis upon which the report was written and the conclusion weighed alongside the existing literature.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

This section deals with the presentation and analysis of the data obtained from in-depth interview and focus group discussion, both of which are qualitative instruments. As can be observed, the contents of both instruments are essentially the same and the responses are similar. The items of both the in-depth interview and focus group discussion are designed to provide answers to the research questions stated in section one. It can also be observed that some of the items of the research instruments are repeated variously under varying contents. This was intended to establish consistency and reliability.

Data Obtained From In-Depth Interview:

Research question One; what are the factors influencing public participation in election in Cross River State, Nigeria?

This all-embracing question constitutes the main focus of the research. It is designed to test the validity of the other four research questions. To answer this question, responses to items... of the in-depth interview and... of the focus group discussion were examined.

TABLE 4.1 A. FACTORS INFLUENCING PARTICIATION IN ELECTION IN CROSS RIVER STATE.

ITEMS	RESPONSES MAJORITY	RESPONSES MINORITY
Reason for election.	To choose leader	Civic Rights.
Electoral process.	Free fair and credible	Without violence.
Qualities of candidate to motivate voting.	Academic credentials, trustworthiness.	Popularity.
Identity with political party.	People oriented Manifesto, National character without bias to ethno-regional and religious affiliation	Composition of leadership.
Choice of election to vote.	All	Selective.
What makes you not to vote?	Electoral fraud.	Electoral violence and bad government.

From the table above, majority of the respondents indicated that they vote in election in order to choose political leaders, while the minority indicated that they do so as an expression of their civic rights. On the issue of L.G.C Elections conducted by state, majority of the respondents indicated that they prefer Fed INEC to conduct all elections to ensure credibility, while the minority where silent. Regarding the qualities of candidates to attract vote during election, majority of the respondents cited Transparency and trustworthiness, while the minority opted for popularity. On the question of what attracts persons to any known political party, majority of the respondents indicated manifesto and ideology, while the minority indicated composition of the leadership of the party. Concerning the choice of election the electorates choose to participate, majority of the respondents indicated All, while the minority select which election to vote based on personal interest. On the question of what discourages anyone from going out to vote during election, majority attributed it to electoral fraud and violence by supporters and political parties.

How Does Awareness of Participatory Democracy Influence Public Participation in Election? This research question was designed to assess the depth of understanding of the electorate concerning the essence of voting during election.

TABLE 4.1B AWARENESS OF THE ESSENCE OF VOTING IN ELECTIONS:

ITEMS	RESPONSES MAJORITY	RESPONSES MINORITY
The need to vote in every election.	To select political leaders.	To exercise rights of franchise.
Eligibility to vote during election.	Nigerian citizens, 18yrs and above.	NIL
Winner of election.	Highest votes as defined by law.	Uncertain/unpredictable.
Motivation to vote.	Quality of candidates, character and credibility.	Credibility of the process to exercise right.
Incentives to vote.	Self confidence of candidates and party manifesto.	NIL
Credentials of candidates.	Consistency in credible leadership and good morals.	NIL
Selective participation in voting.	All are important.	Caliber of candidates and parties in contexts.

The table above shows that majority of the respondents are of the opinion that the need to vote in every election is driven by the desire to choose political leaders, while the minority indicated that they do so to exercise the rights of franchise. Majority of the respondents also indicated that does eligible to vote in election are Nigerian citizens of 18yrs and above. The winner of every election is determined by majority votes defined by law, while others opined that victory is uncertain and unpredictable. Also, majority of the respondents indicated that it is necessary to vote in every election to choose political leaders, while minority merely refers to it as exercise of franchise. Regarding the motivation to vote for any candidate, majority of the respondents indicated that they are motivated by the character and credibility of the person, while the minority indicated that they are motivated by the opportunity to participate in the process. Regarding incentives given to motivate people to vote, majority of the respondents indicated that they anchor on self confidence of candidates and party manifesto, while others made no comment. Concerning the particular credentials which determine choice of candidate to vote for, majority of the respondents indicated consistency incredible leadership and good morals, while others were silent. On the question of selecting which election to vote, A slight majority indicated that, it is unjustifiable to select which election to participate in because all are important, while others argued that it is justifiable considering the Caliber of candidates and parties in contexts.

How Does Public Perception of Political Actors and the Electoral Process Influence Participation in an Election? This research question was intended to establish the public image of political actors and the electoral process.

TABLE 4.1C THE IMPACT OF POLITICAL ACTORS ON THE ELECTORAL PROCESS.

ITEMS	RESPONSES MAJORITY	RESPONSES MINORITY
Impression on electoral process.	Corrupt and unreliable.	Evolving and Fair.
The role of the judiciary.	Abused by politicians.	Interprets electoral outcome based on law.
How the poor and ignorant are swayed.	Vote buying in cash and kind.	Not Sure.
Impact of violence on election.	Scares away voters.	Undecided.
Similarity between party primaries and General election.	Both characterized by huge expenditure in campaign.	Not Sure.
How delegates are guided to vote	Vote for popular candidate with geographical spread.	To vote according to conscience.
Problems of election by INEC.	Late arrival of materials, malfunctioning of electoral machines, interference by political parties, violence.	NIL
L.G.C Election by state INEC.	Manipulated, not free & fair.	NIL

From the table above majority of the respondents indicated that, they electoral process is corrupt and unreliable, while the minority opinion was that the process is evolving and therefore considerably fair. Majority of the respondents also indicated that the judiciary is abused by politicians with frivolous litigations before and after election, while the minority opinion is that, they judiciary merely interprets electoral outcomes based on law. Concerning the manipulation of the poor and ignorant during election, majority of the respondents indicated that they are swayed through vote buying in cash and kind, while the minority indicated that they were not sure. On the issue of violence during election, majority opinion was that it scares away prospective voters, while the minorities were undecided. Concerning the similarity between the conduct of party primaries and General election, majority opinion was that both are characterized by huge expenditure during campaign and the electoral process, while the minorities were silent. Majority of the respondents also indicated that, party delegates were usually guided by the political chieftains to vote for a popular candidate with wild geographical spread, while the minority opinion was that delegates vote according to their conscience. Concerning the problems identifiable with the conduct of elections by INEC, All the respondents unanimously cited late arrival of materials, malfunctioning of electoral machines, interference by political parties and violence. Regarding the viability of state INEC in the conduct of Local Government Council Elections, majority of the respondents indicated that the process is often manipulated by the party in power and therefore not free & fair. They were no opposing minority view.

How Does Primordial Sentiment Influence Public Participation in Election? In view of the ongoing debate by scholars this research question was designed to access which side of the debate the electorate identify with.

TABLE 4.1D IMPACT OF PRIMORDIAL SENTIMENT

ITEMS	RESPONSES MAJORITY	RESPONSES MINORITY
How primordial sentiments shape choice of candidates.	Credible credentials in character and capability.	Party affiliation/ ethnic relations.
Influential factors for choice in Cross River State.	Zoning as sole determinant.	Party followership/ financial prowess.
Strategies to de-emphasize ethnicity.	Promote political awareness via multiple media to accommodate others.	Credible candidates in character and performance.
Role of community leaders.	Shape the political direction of their subjects.	Play subordinate roles to political actors.
Functionality of zoning formula.	Positively functional to promote equity and social justice.	Unnecessary, Dysfunctional.
Dominance of political chieftains.	Not good, brings corruption and inefficiency.	Right: They are financiers.
Effects of ethnic consciousness.	Determines voting pattern.	Popularity of candidate.

In a competitive election where primordial sentiments are rife, majority of the respondents indicated that their choice of candidate to be voted for would be based on credible credentials in character and capability, while the minority opinion anchored on familiarity, party affiliation or ethnic relations. In a similar question particularly in Cross River State, majority of the respondents indicated Zoning as the sole determinant, while the minority opted for Party followership/ financial resourcefulness. Also related to this issue, majority opinion as a strategy to de-emphasize ethnicity opted for the promotion of political awareness via multiple media to accommodate others. Minority opinion on the other hand, emphasized on the adoption of credible candidates in character and performance. Concerning the role of community leaders, majority of the respondents indicated that they were often swayed by political chieftains to shape the political direction of their subjects. Similarly, minority opinion was that community leaders merely play subordinate roles to political actors. Concerning the functionality of the zoning formula, majority of the respondents indicated that it is positively functional to promote equity and social justice, while the minority opinion was that it is dysfunctional because it promotes mediocrity. Concerning the dominance of political chieftains in the process of selecting candidates for election, majority opinion was that, it is a helpless situation which breeds corruption and inefficiency. Minority opinion on the other hand hold that, they are justified because the sponsor financial expenditure of the party. On the question of ethno-regional politics, majority of the respondents indicated that, these issues significantly determine voting pattern among the electorates, while the minority opinion anchored on popularity of the candidate.

How Does Voter Education Influence Public Participation in Election? Voter apathy is retrogressive under democratic governance. To guard against this trend, this research question was designed to look for alternative means to intensify voter education and thereby promote mass participation of the electorate in election.

TABLE 4.1E VOTER EDUCATION

ITEMS	RESPONSES MAJORITY	RESPONSES MINORITY
The process of voting.	Sequential, Accreditation, voting, counting of votes and declaration.	Complaints of delay and rowdiness.
Voter education.	Party leaders, emphasis on party programmes and candidates.	Mass media, emphasis on character and capability of candidates.
Opinion on multiple political parties.	Promotes healthy competition and averts monopoly.	Unnecessary, some not viable.
How to encourage people to vote.	Good governance, electoral integrity and security.	Expansion of political education and voter education.
Role of community leaders.	Non-partisan approach, through workshops and seminars.	Remunerated.
Voter education by INEC.	Registration, conduct of election.	Political education and voter education.
Mass media in voter education.	Publicity to party programmes/ candidates through discussions and interviews.	NIL
How political education and voter education can be expanded	Formal education	Media participation.

Concerning the process of voting, majority of the respondents who seemed to be familiar indicated that, the process is sequential, starting with Accreditation, voting, counting of votes and declaration. The minority on the other hand, complain of delay and rowdiness. Concerning the issue of voter education, majority of the respondents indicated that it is often spear-headed by party leaders, with emphasis on party programmes and candidates. Minority opinion on the other hand attributed it to the mass media, with emphasis on character and capability of candidates. On the issue of multiple political parties in contexts during election, majority of the respondents indicated that it promotes healthy competition and averts monopoly, while the minority opinion was that it is unnecessary because some are not viable. Concerning the strategy to encourage more people to go out and vote during election, majority of the respondents cited good governance, electoral integrity and security, while the minority view suggested expansion of political education and voter education. Also, majority of the respondents indicated that community leaders should be co-opted into the vanguard for voter education, using Non-partisan approach, while the minority also added that they should be remunerated. Also, majority opinion was that the role of INEC in voter education should be limited to Registration, conduct of election, while the minority opinion also added that, it should include political education. Concerning the role of the mass media in voter education,

majority opinion suggested that it should include Publicity of party programmes/ candidates through discussions and interviews. There was no opposing minority view. Furthermore, majority of the respondents indicated that political education should be introduced in the school system to increase awareness of the political system among the citizenry.

Focus Group Discussion Data

The selection for participants for focus group discussion was based on age, gender and educational status. It was a combination of introverts and extroverts. This strategy was designed to expose the participants to discuss wholeheartedly in a common platform. As can be observed, the data obtained from focus group discussion (though varied in expression), tallied with the data obtained from in-depth interview. They range from personal and public opinions spread in the social media, electronic and print media as well as inter-personal relationships.

I. What are the factors influencing public participation in elections in Cross River State.

The discussants from the six selected local government areas varied slightly over their areas of emphasis. In (FGD1 Obudu), the young female discussants tended to agree with their male counterparts, rather than express their personal opinions. For (FGD Obudu, Ogoja, Ikom, and Calabar municipality), male discussants young and old were vibrant in expressing their personal opinions on the key factors. These include popularity of candidate/political party, observance of the principle of rotation in selecting candidates, financial resourcefulness of candidates, offer of gifts as democratic dividends and personal interest. Majority of the discussants were of the opinion that, the impact of these various factors predetermines electoral outcomes in most cases. Apparently, the issues of personal integrity and capability of candidates were de-emphasized. This posture is in contrast with Euro-American societies, where political ideology, personal integrity and capability are considered to be key factors which influence voting behavior of the electorate (Denver 1994, MC Greal 2017, Egobueze & Ojirika 2017).

II. How does awareness of participatory democracy influence public participation in election?

On awareness of the essence of voting during election, there was divided opinion amongst the discussants. Majority of them could not appreciate the essence of voting to select political leaders. Their reason was anchored on the overbearing influence of political chieftains who impose candidates for election on the public via party primaries. At the other extreme, majority of the discussants argue that, if the electoral process is free, fair and credible, voting manifests the essence of participatory democracy (Brusky 2017, Eulau et al 2019).

On the issue of voter apathy, the discussants variously argued that, this trend was a reflection of public reaction to the poor image of the political system. This is manifest in corrupt politics, rigging of election results and violence before, during and after elections, (Fagunwa 2019).

Others blamed the role of the judiciary in determining the ultimate winner of any given election. For them, this provision in the constitution and electoral law defeats the essence of voting during election. This position is in line with (Omotola 2021).

III. How does public perception of political actors and the electoral process influence participation in an election?

The public image of political actors and the electoral system exhibits a gloomy picture. Generally, political actors were described as corrupt, self-seeking and dangerous species. It was argued that, their main aim to grab political power is to amass wealth through dubious means. They were also described as intolerant and wicked to the extent of promoting violence, arson and killing of political opponents through physical or fetish means. The electoral system was also seen in bad light. This was linked with the antics of political actors who manipulate the electoral system through corrupt practices and violence. Both the permanent and Ad-hoc Staffs of the electoral body fall prey of the network of corruption. In this atmosphere, some adult-male discussants from the six selected local government areas refer to election results as allocation of figures by the electoral body to political parties with no trace of fairness or credibility. Minority opinion here was that the dominance of political actors in the electoral process both at party primaries and General election was justifiable. According to them, the huge financial investments at party primaries, campaign and General election were expected to yield dividends. These views are consistent with the characterization of political actors by some scholars (Ekeh & Osaghae 1998, Amuwo et al 1998, Akinola 1996 & Fagunwa 2019, Omotola 2021 & Orji 2009). Awareness of this scenario is capable of influencing individuals or groups to vote or not to vote during election.

IV. How does primordial sentiment influence public participation in election?

It should not be surprising to note that, primordial sentiments still play a key role in partisan politics in Nigeria. Many of the discussants highlighted these facts variously. The range from choice of candidates to stand for election at party level and General Election. Some female discussants in (FGD Obudu, Ogoja, Ikom, Yakur and Calabar) were very vocal to support the principle of rotation of political leadership within the state and insisted that it should be respected in fairness to all. The minority opinion on this issue was that “It is old fashion”. According to them, the credibility of any candidate for election should be anchored on personal integrity and capability. In a situation where the candidates did not have any cultural or geographical affiliation with certain people, it degenerates into voter apathy. This is manifest in low turn-out of voters during election. These views are supported by (Ukiwo 2005 & Orji 2013).

V. How does voter education influence public participation in election?

Majority of the discussants in the six selected local government areas recognized voter education as a veritable tool to motivate eligible voters to vote during election. The modalities of carrying out this duty vary from informal to formal approaches. Public enlightenment on the process of voting is carried out by Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), through the electronic and print media. Political parties and other concerned individuals as well as non-governmental organizations also mobilize the public to go out and vote during election. The male discussants in particular, argued that these various efforts do not seem to make much impact on the electorate because of certain identified problems. These include, vote buying and selling, rigging and electoral violence. It was observed that these illegal acts were committed by political thugs in collaboration with INEC officials and security agencies. Others further argued that, the continued existence of the identified electoral fraud largely contribute to voter apathy witnessed in every election conducted by INEC.

Furthermore, this ugly trend was blamed on the overbearing influence of political chieftains (otherwise referred to as “God-fathers), who determine the choice of candidates

to stand for election through tactful manipulation of the party structure from the grassroots. In doing so, personal integrity or capability of the candidates are played down. In view of this scenario, some other discussants in Obudu, Ogoja and Calabar were of the view that, votes do not count and that, whosoever was anointed by the party chieftains to stand for election wins. For a better outcome in any election, some discussants suggested that voter education should be intensified and extended beyond the current trend. This suggestion is in line with (Ibeanu et al 2014, Almond and Verbal 1989).

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary:

The findings from this research are as follows:

- I. The electorate in Cross River State (which is the study area) has not sufficiently been able to evolve a definite political culture to guide their participation in election. From the data obtained, it shows that the majority of the respondents are mobilized to vote based on sentiments or material inducements. This atmosphere prevails largely due to the near absence of political ideology by the existing political parties. In view of this scenario, the key factors which influence public participation in election are vague and unpredictable. This is manifest in the low turnouts of voters during election, compared with large crowds of people that are recorded during electioneering campaign.
- II. There is evidence of poor understanding of the essence of voting in an election, which has implication on democratic governance. This is because public perception of election is beclouded by undemocratic practices exhibited by both state and non-state actors before, during and after elections. The process of selecting candidates for election is dominated by the overbearing influence of rich political chieftains and it is riddled with corruption and violence.
- III. In spite of the hue and cry by the intellectual class, social critiques and the media to adopt democratic principles which are hinged on equity and social justice, primordial sentiments expressed in ethnicity, religious and regional politics have continued to rear their ugly heads to direct public participation in election. This is manifest in electoral violence and uncomplimentary remarks made by individuals and groups on the prier media, radio and television as well as the social media.
- IV. Mistrust of the political class and the election process constitutes another drawback in the democratic experience in Nigeria. Public impression about politics is that, it is a dirty game. It therefore means that those who indulge in it are bound to be dirty. This starts with the process of selecting candidates to the conduct of election by the electoral body. All that are involved in the entire process are accused of corruption, including the judiciary which stands out as the final arbiter of election matters.
- V. Voter education organized by the electoral body (INEC) is grossly inadequate. This explains why corruption and political prostitution have become a norm in our body politics. Thus the saying: "If you cannot win them, join them". In the alternative, and all-embracing programme involving schools, community leaders, religious leaders and the media will be more effective in changing the worldview of the electorate and the political class to desist from electoral malpractices.

Educational Implications:

Voting in election expresses the essence of democracy in every modern polity. This view is shared by many scholars as can be observed in the review of related literature in this Thesis. The key features in these contexts are the electorate, political actors and the electoral

body. The process is also assisted by ad-hoc staffs and security agencies. The exercise is expected to be free, fair and credible as defined by the electoral law and constitution of the country. Unfortunately, the Nigerian experience so far reflects the obverse. Essentially, the electoral process appears to be deficient in integrity. The vulnerability of security agents and the judiciary are also not spared of blame (Omotola 2021). The mistrust of the electoral system is tied to the suspected impact of the character of party politics in Nigeria. This situation owes much to the fact that the price for political office is rated so high and the democratic institution is so weak. Also, political competition is fierce and sometimes violent. The cost incurred range from procurement of nomination form, inducement to supporters at party primaries and general election and publicity campaigns in the print, electronic and social media etc.

The failure of political actors to imbibe political culture is likely responsible for this scenario (Ake 2005). The Nigerian public has been reacting variously in the past and present towards this trend (E.g. the upsurge of the nation-wide “END SARS” of 2020 which culminated in the massive support of the obedient movement during the 2023 General electioneering campaigns). The massive show of support for a common course displayed by youth is a pointer to the fact that an effective programme of socio-political engineering of the populace is capable of reshaping the political future of Nigeria to a great extent (Ibeanu and Orji 2014).

Unfortunately our democratic advancement has continued to be stagnated by the old “foe” which reminds us of our diversity, from the past to the present. These include: (Ekeh and Osaghae 1989, Amuwo et al. 1998, Akinola 1996) and (Orji 2009) others also include, (Akhaine 2011, Lewis 2011, and Gberie 2011). In the first republic emphasis was on regional development, while National unity and National consciousness were de-emphasis. The unresolved strife among political leaders to control national resource destabilized the polity. These ill feelings infiltrated the military who planned a coup and toppled the government. The military themselves became engrossed in ethnic/regional politics which led to coups and counter coups.

In the second republic, presidential system of government was adopted as a better alternative to parliamentary system. Unfortunately, the political actors of the first republic re-emerged in new outfit without any fundamental changes in their political mission. They were branded as inept, corrupt and toppled the government. In the present circumstance, primordial sentiments are still noticeable amongst the various ethno-regional groups which tend to blur the articulated injustice, corruption and marginalization. These include Afeniferi for the Yoruba nation, Ohaneze Indigbo for the Igbo-nation and Arewa people’s congress/ Nihet-Allah for the North and Fulani nation. The way forward is to adopt electoral integrity in the process of selecting political leaders at both party structure and General elections.

Electoral integrity cannot be achieved by sudden flight. It requires the co-operation of political actors and their supporters with government law enforcement agencies as well as the legal institutions. Towards this end, mechanisms for promoting and maintaining integrity in every aspect of the electoral process are often established within the official bodies that administer or support the administration of elections. These mechanisms make it possible to monitor actions of the electoral administration; ensure oversight of the electoral process by other government sectors or agencies as well as civil society, and the media. It also provides for enforcement of electoral rules and regulations through administrative or legal means. This is because; consistent legitimate electoral standards and practices help detect errors which

help to prevent electoral improprieties and illegalities, and also help ensure integrity (Kofi Annan Foundation, 2012).

Conclusion:

The outcome of this research clearly shows that the Nigerian electorates (including those from the study area) are sufficiently aware of the global advocacy for democratic governance in which voting in election is essential. In view of this, factors influencing public participation in election were measured in the context of democratic governance. To be more emphatic to our peculiar environment, certain unorthodox practices were also identified. These include material inducements under the guise of (democratic dividends), rigging and violence. Amidst all these, was the issue of mistrust of the electoral process which tended to affect the enthusiasm of prospective voters. The unethical conduct of political actors also gave the impression that, politics is a dirty game and those who engaged it were likely to be soiled. On the whole, all the research questions were appropriately answered. There was sufficient awareness among the respondents concerning the essence of voting during election. What determine choice of candidate or parties to vote for were tied to personal judgment or manipulation of political chieftains. It was also established that primordial sentiments expressed in ethnic or regional affiliation were still rife. This was accepted as a measure to promote equity and play down on marginalization. The efficiency and integrity of the electoral process were distorted by the antics of desperate politicians through violence and court litigations. Voter education solely by INEC (which itself is a government agency), was also found to be grossly inadequate. A non-partisan approach via non-state actors would be more effective.

Recommendations:

- ❖ A deliberate policy to compel political parties to fashion their philosophy within the context of a defined ideology should be introduced.
- ❖ Decampment of public office holders from one party to another should be annulled by law.
- ❖ Requirements for political leadership should be based on capability, integrity and without prejudice to creed or ethnicity.
- ❖ Voter education should be enlarged to include schools, community leaders and religious leaders, without inclination to any political party.
- ❖ To curtail the huge cost of governance in Nigeria, the expenditure of all public office holders who travel out of the country for both private and official trips should be closely monitored and publicized to guard against money laundering. Also, access to public funds of all public office holders should be approved by the legislature and documented for posterity.
- ❖ To reduce corruption and the predominance of rich political cheating in party affairs, the cost of procuring nomination forms to contest in all elections should be drastically reduced by legislation.
- ❖ Payment of the legislation should be base on sitting allowances and not fixed salaries.
- ❖ Persons arrested for electoral violence, banditry, insurgency and their sponsors should be severely dealt with according to the law.
- ❖ The number of political parties in the country should be reduced to ease tension among several contestants.

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APPENDIX ‘ONE’

In-depth Interview Guide

We are from the Federal University of Lafia on a research mission to investigate factors influencing public participation in election in Cross River State, Nigeria. Your cooperation is required to voluntarily respond to the under listed items that follow. Please, respond frankly to the items as they affect you or your constituency in particular and the State in general. Be rest assured that your information will be treated with absolute confidentiality. This is because; our data analysis would be based on general comments of the respondents, which would not reveal your particular identity. Note also that you are free to decline responding to any item that you are not convinced. If you are satisfied with this explanation and agree to participate in this activity, we can then proceed.

BACKGROUND

i. Age: (18-40) (41-70)

ii. Gender: (Male/Female)

iii. Educational Status: (Literate/Non Literate)

iv. _____ LGA

v. _____ Local _____ Community

vi. The position of the person in the Community _____

Factors influencing public participation in election in Cross River State.

1. Why do you vote in any election?

2. What is your opinion on the conduct of Local Government election by State INEC?

3. What qualities in any candidate motivates you to vote for?

4. What endears you to any known political party?

5. In the series of elections conducted by INEC, which ones do you participate in?

6. What are the reasons responsible for low turnout of voters during election?

7. What will make you not to vote in any election?

Awareness of the essences of voting in election:

8. Why do you need to vote in every election?

9. Under civil democracy, who is qualified to vote during election?

10. Who can be declared winner in any given election?

11. Why is it necessary to vote during election?

12. What motivates you to vote during election?

13. What incentives do you expect to motivate you to vote for any candidate and party during election?

14. What are the credentials of a particular candidate which attracts you to vote?

15. How justifiable is it to select which election to participate in?

The impact of political actors on the electoral process.

ii. The electoral process

16. What is your impression about the electoral process in Nigeria?

17. How do you explain the role of the judiciary to determine the final verdict of an election?

18. How are the poor and ignorant manipulated to sway their votes during election in the state?

19. What is the impact of violence on electoral outcome before, during and after election?

20. State the difference of similarity between the conduct of primary election by political parties and the conduct of general elections by INEC?

21. In the process of selecting candidates to stand for election, how are the delegates guided to vote by political

parties _____

22. What are the common problems identifiable with the conduct of election by INEC?

23. What is your opinion about the conduct of Local Government Elections by state INEC?

iii. Impact of primordial sentiment

24. What motivates you to vote for a particular candidate in an election?

25. In the process of selecting political leaders via election in cross river state, what factors are more considered by political parties to determine the choice of candidates?

26. What strategy can be devised to play down on ethnic politics in Cross River State?

27. What role do community leaders play in determining who to vote for in an election?

28. How functional is the agitation for political leadership based on zoning?

29. What is your opinion on the dominance of political chieftains in the process of selecting candidates for election in Nigeria?

30. How does ethnic consciousness affect voting pattern in election in the state?

31. In the present circumstance, how does religious factor affect social interaction and voting during election?

i. Voter education

32. Describe the process of voting during election in Nigeria

33. During enlightenment campaigns, how was the need for you to vote explained and by who?

34. What is your opinion on the existence of having several political parties in Nigeria?

35. Name the media through which you receive political education?

36. Through what means can political education or political socialization further be promoted in the country?

36. What do you think should be done to encourage people to vote during elections?

37. In what ways can community leaders be mobilized to promote voter education?

38. To what extent should INEC partake in voter education?

39. In what ways can the mass media help to promote voter education?

40. What can you do as an individual to encourage people to participate in election?

APPENDIX ‘TWO’

(FGD Guide)

We are from the Federal University of Lafia on a research mission to investigate factors influencing public participation in election in Cross River State, Nigeria. Your cooperation is required to voluntarily participate in this discussion. In the course of this exercise, you can be rest assured that the information obtain from you will be treated with anonymity, which those not required your name. Furthermore, our data analysis would be based on general comments of members of this community and therefore would not reveal your identity. Please, comment on the issues raised frankly as they affect you in particular and the State in general. Be informed that it is necessary to capture your discussions on tape to enable us recall the key issues that are discussed. Please note; do not call the other discussants by their actual names but numbers while we are on tape recording. Note also that you are free to decline further participation in this research at any point in time you feel uncomfortable. If you do not one to continue, just take permission to go out. We shall take just less than two hours of your time and no more. If you are satisfied with this explanation and agree to participate in this activity, please append your signature or right-hand thumb print.

1. What are the factors that influence public participation in election in Cross River State, Nigeria?
 - i. How does personal integrity and capability of candidates attracts people to vote during election.
 - ii. How significant is the composition of political leadership.
 - iii. What factors can discourage people to vote during election.
 - iv. How significant is political manifesto
2. In what way does awareness of participatory democracy influence public participation in election?
 - i. How is awareness created?
 - ii. How do people respond to political decisions on voting?
3. How does public perception of political actors and the electoral process influence participation in an election?
 - i. Public rating of the integrity of INEC.
 - ii. Commitment of INEC permanent and Ad-hoc staffs and security agents.
 - iii. Relationship between political leaders and party agents etc.
4. How does primordial sentiment influence public participation in election?
 - i. Political chieftains.
 - ii. Community leaders.
 - iii. Religious leaders.
 - iv. Background of candidates.
5. In what ways can public participation in electoral process be encouraged through voter education?
 - i. “By individuals”
 - ii. By community
 - iii. By Non Governmental system

- iv. By political parties
- v. Local and state government.