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## Opinion polls, election surveys, and voter apathy in 2023 Nigeria's presidential election

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the nature, dynamics, and impact of opinion polls, election surveys, and voter apathy in 2023 the Presidential elections in Nigeria. The objective of the paper is to interrogate data on opinion polls and election surveys to understand the narrative being used in trying to reshape and influence public opinions in Nigeria before the 2023 general elections. The research method used in the paper is the documentary research approach and direct observations. The paper is anchored on Dankwart Rostow's dynamic model of democracy transition as a theoretical framework for analysis. The findings of the paper reveal that there is growing concern and consistency of voter apathy in Nigeria's democratic experiment with the 2023 general elections as the worst-case scenario at 28 percent voter turnout. Moreover, the opinion polls conducted

before the elections mostly lacked methodological rigor in sample size, relied heavily on social media surveys and the outcome was error-ridden and biased, and could not predict correctly. The All Progressives Congress (APC), the government party, has a Muslim/Muslim presidential ticket, which heavily influences election campaigns to be religious-based rather than issue-based. The failure of BVAS and INEC to transmit the presidential election results live fell short of Nigerians' expectations and compromised the integrity of the electoral process. The paper concludes with the recommendations that opinion polls be conducted by experts, the need for massive voter education in Nigeria, and the unbundling of INEC to address logistical and administrative challenges.

**Keywords** – Election survey, General Elections, Nigeria, Opinion polls, Voter apathy

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Periodic elections have been considered the norm in modern democratic societies worldwide. Elections form the crux of a democratization process where the electorates are provided with the rights and opportunities to elect whomever they deem fit to champion their cause. Heywood (1997) asserts that elections give the general public a chance to participate in the political and electoral process and to decide who will wield political or governmental authority.

In Nigeria, the credibility or otherwise of elections remains debatable and is viewed from different political, and legal periscopes, media practitioners, election observer missions, and the completely parochial uninformed society. Despite reforms and legal frameworks introduced the attitude of the political class has a greater negative effect on the ideals of the democratic society. It has manifested in the way and manner elections were handled by the ruling party by using the power of incumbency despite a glaring democratic deficit (Mohammed, 2014). In as much as

some believe elections are mere charades that do not reflect the wishes of the electorates, others are of the view that in an evolutionary democracy like ours, appreciable progress has been recorded so far in representations and governance in Nigeria despite her complexities and observable shortcomings. In his view, Dunn (1993) argued that the power and appeal of democracy come from the idea of the autonomy of choosing freely. These are fundamental principles of democracy expressed in consent and freedom to choose.

Previous studies have demonstrated that Nigerian society is largely apathetic to issues of elections which constitutes a big minus on many progresses made so far. This is buttressed by the fact that the percentage of actual voters on election days is grossly inadequate compared to the number of registered voters and by extension, to the entire population of qualified voters who have attained the age of 18 and above. According to Umunakwe, Nzeagwu, Aguzie, & Akaire (2022), liberal democracy if it is properly practice can transform the socio-economic and political situation of Nigeria that can lead to sustainable development. This is because political stability can attract foreign direct investment and can create ease of doing business. Hence, all these depend on free, fair, and credible elections as pillar of democracy. In 2015, Nigeria with a population of almost Two Hundred Million people was able to record a paltry Seventy-Five Million as registered voters while about Four Million were weeded out due to double registration. The voter turnout for the election was 44% (The Cable, January 13, 2015). In 2019, there seems to be a little improvement where Twenty-Eight Million of the Eighty-Two Million registered voters were able to cast their votes at the polling units which represented 35% of total registered voters (Premium Times, February 2019).

This is abysmal and a clear display of nonchalance on the part of the electorates. Initially, it looked as if the 2023 election would consolidate on the progress made so far by recording more voters as against what was obtained in the previous elections, but results show that the 2023 election recorded the worst turnout in recent times where in a country that boasts of over 200 million citizens today could only manage a disappointing 25 million vote cast out of 93 million registered voters for those who partake in the general elections of their leaders. Election opinion polls have been making waves before the 2023 general elections. A number of them have begun to publish their reports. They did not just start in this election circle. Opinion polls on election surveys are not common in Nigeria as a result of the 30 years of military rule which hampered democratic rule and practice. However, opinion polls have been around. They majorly play three roles; forecasting election outcomes, understating voter behavior, and planning campaign strategy that provides insight into the likely outcome of the electoral process (Sule, 2022).

According to IDEA (2005), voter apathy is a global phenomenon that appears as a challenge to democracies that cannot be static but rather fluctuate based on the prevailing dynamics of the political systems and the capacity of the people to support it. In both America, since the late 1980s and in Europe, early 1990s democracy voter apathy has been a problem in the consolidation of democracy. The trend is dissimilar but happening in Africa and South American countries. Unfortunately, Nigeria since 2011 has been witnessing lower voter turnout in her national elections. It is against the backdrop of this politico-electoral dynamics that the paper seeks to investigate the impact of public opinions, and election surveys, and unravel salient issues concerning the causes of voter apathy in the 2023 general elections.

## **2. LITERATURE SURVEY**

### **Conceptual discourse**

#### **Opinion polls**

The function of public opinion and how it affects the operation of a government, especially a democratic government, is a hotly debated topic. The justification for this is that democracy is viewed as the rule, voice, and power of the people. The theory of public opinion is predicated on the following premises: i) the public is interested in government affairs; ii) the public knows what it wants in such matters; iii) the public can express its wants in such matters; and iv) whatever law is enacted, it should be in accordance with the public's opinion (Johari, 1979: 450).

While opinion refers to a person's belief and attitude that expresses their personality on matters of national importance, the public is defined as the people in a normative meaning and as merely intelligent in an empirical sense. When a viewpoint is driven by concern for the general good of society, it can be said to be truly public. The viewpoint must be national, broad, or public rather than sectarian, sectional, or communal (Lowell, 1911).

According to Lipmann (1978), the environment influences how people feel about things. According to him, information gained from the environment greatly influences how people think about politics. People acquire powerful impressions in their thoughts that take the form of stereotypes based on what they learn through their connections or direct associations. National opinions on questions of public policy are influenced by the interactions of imagination, memory, prejudice, emotion, and partial information.

### **Voter apathy**

Voter apathy has acquired strong relevance because of its implications on the practice of democracy. Voter apathy which is a subdivision of political apathy has therefore resurfaced as a foremost problem in developing and developed democracies (Okafor, Odigbe & Okeke, 2022). According to Ajah (2022), voter indifference is a significant threat to Nigerian democracy. Public disinterest in or indifference toward the political and democratic processes is a concerning trend. A significant contributor to reduced voter turnout in elections where voting is optional is this lack of interest. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2009), voter apathy is the ratio between the number of voters to the number of persons with voting rights. This indicated that when citizens do not vote in an election their rights to participation are trampled upon. The trend in Nigeria reflects this concern about voting rights.

Fagunwa (2015) noted that voter apathy is in two forms; the refusal of the voting population to register during registration and the refusal of qualified voters to cast their votes. He further explained, however, that registration of voters does not guarantee voting because many people register with different intentions. However, this conception neglected the voter apathy deliberately planned by the government using state apparatus of violence, institutional manipulations, corruption of electoral officials and political sabotage. Voter indifference in Nigeria is a persistent issue that has over the years affected municipal and gubernatorial elections as well as national elections. As previously said, substantial concerns have been raised by Nigerians and international election observers about what the widespread voter indifference or low voter turnout in the recent 2019 general elections portends for the country's embryonic democracy and the way forward.

According to Maduagwu, Agudiegwu, Onyia, Odoh and Egbor (2020), the following factors contribute to Nigeria's ongoing voter apathy crisis: (a) Undemocratic behavior on the part of Nigerian politicians and opaque party politics, which have long weakened the decorum and stability of the political system. (b) Institutional shortcomings in voter education, voter eligibility (issuing voter cards), and the legitimacy of the electoral process by Nigeria's election management agency. (c) The tumultuous and violent nature of Nigerian elections, where lives have been lost, has over time made many Nigerian voters fearful of taking part in the process. (d) Centrifugal tendencies of localized mistrust and animosity. (e) One of the main factors contributing to voter indifference in Nigeria is poor governance. (f) Millions of people had to leave their homes due to insecurity, as seen by the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria's North East and banditry in the Middle Belt. Millions of these susceptible Nigerian voters are currently residing in IDP Camps with no means of support. (g) A culture of voter mistrust has been ingrained among Nigeria's millions of electorates throughout the years as a result of weak state institutions, poverty, and a faltering economy.

An election survey report from the United Kingdom in 2019 looked at five factors to explain why individuals don't vote, including: (A) a lack of enthusiasm. Just being uninterested is one reason why people choose not to vote. (b) a lack of knowledge. Many non-voters had the belief that they lacked sufficient information of the political system, electoral procedures, or party platforms. Disillusionment is (c). A significant percentage of the British population is fed up with the "political elite," whom they neither trust nor identify with. (d) Residents of safe seats.

Many nonvoters are engaged in politics and may even support a particular political party, but they choose not to cast a ballot because they believe it would be useless. (e) They are unable. Some people refrain from voting because they are simply not permitted to. Members of the House of Lords, the majority of prisoners, and foreign nationals who do not reside in the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, or the Commonwealth do not have the right to vote (Maduagwu et al., 2020).

The most prevalent form of political engagement in democratizing cultures is voting (Mahmud, 2015). It meant that the percentage of eligible voters who cast ballots in an election depends on voter turnout. Similar to this, voter turnout is typically calculated as a percentage of eligible voters casting a ballot. The presumption is that the more people who vote, the more people participate in the voting process, and hence, the more democratic the election is (Omotola & Aiyedogbon, 2012).

## 2.1. Literature survey

### Opinion polls and election surveys: A literature review

Early public opinion pioneers saw their major goal as making the public stand up for the "democratic ideals of free expression and the common good." They hoped that through measuring and disseminating public opinion, the firm would advance egalitarian values and undermine dictatorial forces. Both the concept of public opinion and its connection to the theory of capitalist democracy, as well as the function of polling as a communication industry that prospers due to the political environments of mediated debates in democracies, are crucial to the field's historical roots and future (Acholonu, 2012).

Modern opinion polls started in America with Gallup in 1936. Subsequently, the Literary Digest was later introduced. However, these were more general rather than election surveys. According to Blumenthal (2014), the purpose of polling or election surveys is to measure the horse race or to gain a better understanding of voter preferences. The history of the emergence of election forecasting of growth in public polling is divided into three waves. The First Wave started in the 1980s when in-person costly surveys gave way to the use of telephone polls. The Second Wave evolved in the 1990s with the creation of the Internet using in-voice recording. The Third Wave came with the application of online surveys. Most of the polls in Nigeria adopted the third wave using the online survey with different methodological approaches that affect its quality, particularly in the 2023 general elections survey.

The history of poll aggregation that appeared in the news media started in 1992. It was published by the *Economist* which published the "poll of polls" generating information about any election and the happenings in the electoral processes requires a systematic approach. Opinion polls are usually conducted by a pollster, and most times designed to represent the opinions of any given population through responses to a series of questions. These responses could then be extrapolated with other established information for possible generalization (Sneider, 1992; Blumenthal, 2012).

Public opinion, as observed by Natasha (2010), seems to be largely uninformed and often misunderstood, and might directly or indirectly affect policy decisions. An opinion poll usually is the opinion of the educated or enlightened persons excluding the un-enlightened or illiterate because of the methodology used by the pollsters in generating the public sentiments. In some cases, the surveyors manipulatively ask directing or misdirecting questions to suit the goals or objectives of their forecast. The person whose opinion is sought is helpless and innocent.

Heywood (2007) asserts that "elections are seen as nothing less than a visible manifestation of the public interest, in short, the public has spoken" "Public interest" is the part of Heywood's reasoning that matters to us. Does the public's interest in the elections in Nigeria reflect the results that were declared after the election? It indicates that there must be public opinion, which is typically defined as popular attention toward the credibility of the elections, both before and after elections.

Nwodu and Igboeli, (2014) describe public opinion as the "predominant opinion that emerged from several other opinions about a salient issue in a society". An opinion may be acceptable but much depends on its dominance or acceptability among the greatest number of people concerning a subject of interest. It goes to imply that an opinion may not yet be considered public except if it meets certain criteria. Such criteria, according to Nwodu and Koga (2009) may be that the opinion must represent the views of the majority or a significant number of people on an issue; it must also revolve around a specific issue; such specific issue must be a controversial issue of enormous importance to an extent of attracting wide attention; and finally, the divergent views on an issue from which public opinion emerged must be expressed in the mass media to allow easy measurability (Nwodi and Igboeli cited in Biereenu-Nnabugwu & Nwanegbo, 2014).

Public opinion helps those in power to gauge the tempo of public acceptance or dismay about their brand and the character of their leadership. It, therefore, signifies that government is very concerned with public opinion at all levels. To buttress this point, Brooker (2012) averred that "even the most oppressive tyrants need to know what the people are thinking even if just to oppress them more effectively".

To form public opinion, four stages have been identified by Schmidt et al cited in Aliede (2012), rudimentary, crystallization, debate and controversial, and lastly the stage of forming public opinion. The rudimentary stage is a stage of immediate reaction to an announcement in the mass media which may attract sentiments and polarize the citizens between two or more divergent views. The declaration of the alleged winner of the second round of voting in Adamawa by the Resident Electoral Commissioner for instance attracted views as to whether the Electoral Act permits him to act in place of the Returning Officer or not. Secondly, in the Crystallization Stage here, those who have formed an opinion on the emerging issue begin to share their views with others such as colleagues, schoolmates, and family members. Then, the individuals began to monitor events and happenings around and about the issue under discussion in the mass media and extrapolate to see where such opinion aligns with theirs and where it doesn't.

Thirdly, the Debate and Controversial Stage at this stage, the issue has been fully crystallized, and everybody is talking about it from different perspectives and experiences. This is a stage where the issue becomes a subject of debates, discussions, and critical-cum-controversial evaluation by members of the public, groups, the mass media, and even social media. Then opinions began to sift themselves by aligning and realigning, allowing minority opinion to fade away naturally while superior opinion continued to wax stronger. Fourthly, in the Stage of forming Public Opinion, as the arguments, discussions, and evaluations gain momentum and members of the public begin to adjust their opinions and align with superior ones, a predominant opinion would emerge and consequently become public opinion. On the other hand, pre-election and post-election surveys represent an unstructured guide to the expected outcomes of every election; these outcomes may or may not exactly tally with the earlier survey results due partly to apparent gaps in the survey process.

### **3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: A DYNAMIC MODEL OF TRANSITION OF DEMOCRACY**

This paper is anchored on Dankwart Rustow's (1970) dynamic model of transition to democracy. Rustow investigates several theories regarding the causes of democratization and ensures that democracy will endure. In his 1970 article "Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model," Rustow makes the case that conventional approaches to democratization frequently fail to account for the elements that differ between nations and that a dynamic model for democratic transitions is required to describe such processes in individual nations.

Rustow makes the case for a genetic theory of democracy by drawing comparisons between evolution and democratization, in contrast to thinkers like Almond and Verba, and Lipset (Almond & Verba, 1963; Lipset, 1959). Lipset, Almond, Verba, and others who advocate for a consensus on civic culture or a certain degree of economic development (Lipset) are harshly criticized by Rustow. These are, if anything, the effects of democracy rather than its origins. The concept is that instability may allow authoritarian governments to adapt to democratization and

that their ideologies may change over time, much like natural selection. Four distinct stages are the foundation of Rustow's paradigm of democratization. National unity is the first criterion of stage one, which is the backdrop situation. The second stage, or preliminary phase, is made up of the political movements that kickstart democratization. In stage three, the highest levels of political leadership or the elite actively work to bring about democracy. The habituation phase, which introduces a process of selectivity for those who favor democracy among political parties running for office in general elections, is the fourth stage (Rustow, 1970).

Democracy explanations must distinguish between function and genesis since the forces that maintain a democracy may not be the same ones that gave it rise. There may be several routes to democracy; the birth of democracy does not necessarily follow a geographical pattern. Even in the same setting and at the same time, the attitude that fosters democracy may not be the same for politicians and ordinary individuals (Rustow, 1970).

This strategy is strongest because it recognizes that different nations have to go through distinct experiences in terms of their political histories and the formation of formal societal institutions. In the case of Nigeria, the military's involvement in politics impeded the country's attempt at democracy and its political development at several points. The paths that a nation takes toward democracy and the overall stability of the democratic government when it does emerge are typically influenced by variations in development and history. This viewpoint is consistent with the third wave of democratization paradigm proposed by Huntington in 1991.

Similar to this, Przeworski (1991) contends that there are three, occasionally overlapping stages that make up democracy. First, the collapse of the previous regime, which is authoritarianism is a result of losing legitimacy. Second, the transition to democracy. Third, democracy reached its point of consolidation when both elites and the general populace saw it as the only viable option. Baloyra (1987b) presents a typology of democratic transition into four: i) Early-internal, ii) Delayed-external, iii) Delayed-internal, and iv) Late-external. These conceptions use timing and sources that promotes the transition to democracy within countries. In Nigeria, it takes the form of the third typology the delayed-internal. Even though, it is very difficult to develop a general model of how transition occurs due to changing political culture and the regime hard-liners and soft-liners effect on the political system.

Therefore, Rustow's approach takes into account the possibility that instability may lead to an authoritarian leader changing their beliefs to support more political freedom and democracy. The fact that Rustow starts with national harmony as the primary element that enables democratic regimes to finally consolidate power is another advantage of his theory of democratization. A recurring issue in many democratic transitions is the importance of citizen demands for change as a determining element in democratic administrations' ascent to power and legitimacy. Furthermore, national unity frequently increases the overall stability and prospects for the long-term survival of democratic regimes.

Despite the weaknesses of this model of relying on some qualitative indices of national unity, conditions for democratic take off, and consensus of the political elite have captured and better explained Nigeria's Fourth Republic challenges of democratic experience since 1999. The June 12 annulment and General Abacha's *Tzarce* (elongation or continuity of tenure) described both as failed autocratic regime tendencies and provided a golden opportunity for democratic transition to emerge.

#### **4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The data in this paper were gathered using the documentary research approach. The documentary research approach relies on the thorough and methodical examination and analysis of written materials as well as visual and graphical sources, whether they are in the public or private domain. The research also made use of the observation method in eliciting data. Largely, the secondary data were generated from journals, conference papers, books, government publications, official records, data from Think Tanks, local and international election observer

missions, national dailies, security agencies reports, and other online relevant sources. The entire data collection took place between December 2022 and the analysis was done in July 2023.

## 5. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 5.1. The problems of opinion polls and election surveys in Nigeria

The major factor differentiating opinion polls in the Western world and emerging democratic nations is the political purpose. Like in the West, opinion polls are not strictly social scientific instruments in emerging nations like Nigeria. In the West, opinion polls provide results that eventually have significant policy repercussions while being primarily structured and supported as scientific tools. However, due to their ability to have an impact on politics and development, the majority of these opinion surveys in developing democracies are funded by foreign foundations and bilateral organizations (Acholonu, 2012).

Many opinion polls that were conducted before the 2023 presidential elections were controversial and suspicious. These include; ANAP/NOI, SBM, Enough is Enough (EiE), Nextier, POLAF, Bloomberg News, We2GedaR&WS Research, and Kwakol Research in the various surveys using different methodologies and samples concluded and predicted victory for Mr. Peter Obi the Presidential Candidate of Labour Party with margin and scores. We take a look at some of the surveys and their results. Most surveys in the weeks before Nigeria's presidential election on February 25 anticipated that Peter Obi, a candidate for the Labour Party, would win and take office as the country's next leader. Surprisingly, Bola Tinubu, the newly elected president, was receiving more votes than the polls had predicted. Nine different surveys indicated that Mr. Obi will succeed President Muhammadu Buhari in May. Only three of the polls predicted Mr. Tinubu, the candidate for the ruling party, would win (Premium Times, 2023 March 12).

However, the pre-election polls' prediction of a three-horse race turned out to be correct. The fact that each of the three leading candidates won in 12 of the federation's states did not change that. In the last poll, conducted on behalf of the ANAP Foundation and issued on February 15 by NOI Polls, Mr. Obi was in the lead with 21% of voters saying they would support him; 13% said they would support Mr. Tinubu; and 10% said they would support Atiku. However, a total of 53% of the respondents either remained unsure or declined to comment. Several people criticized the foundation and its research methods as a result, while the group said that NOIPolls' methodology was almost the "same" as that employed in earlier presidential polls conducted in 2011, 2015, and 2019. The results of the 2023 election thus demonstrate that ANAP/NOIPolls's 2023 polls were the first to be incorrectly forecasted (NOIPolls, February 2023).

Mr. Obi was predicted by the SBM Intelligence survey for Enough is Enough (EiE) Nigeria to win 15 states and reach the 25 percent mark in 25 states altogether. According to the poll, Mr. Tinubu would win in nine states and receive 25 percent of the vote in 20 states overall, whereas Atiku would win in 11 states and have a 25 percent vote share in 27 states. 11,534 Nigerians were surveyed by SBM Intelligence, which came to the conclusion that "Nigerians will need a second round to decide their next President definitively." The Labour Party candidate was regarded as the "preferred president" by over 53% of respondents in Kwakol's 1,008-person survey, which was issued on February 13th, before the SBM survey. Both Messrs. Tinubu and Atiku scored below 20 percent. Contrary to the above opinion surveys the following organizations and research bodies predicted a Tinubu victory with a slight margin and possible run-up because of tight race. They include; Stears, Fitch Solutions, Dataphyte Research, ETU, and FREDDAN Continental Solutions (Premium Times 2023 March 12).

The various conducted opinion polls could not be without reasons, objectives, and challenges. We examine the challenges from the perspectives of experts in the area of mass media and political science disciplines. Who has vast experience in election forecasting and research methodology.

Professor Umar Pate, vice chancellor of the Federal University in Kashere, Gombe State, emphasized the value of surveys in both public and private settings and observed that the choice of survey methodology was just as significant as the results. Similarly, the president of the Nigerian Political Science Association (NPSA), Professor

Hassan Saliu of the University of Ilorin, claimed that opinion surveys were no longer relevant in Nigeria due to pollster bias. This explains why results from opinion surveys show that respondents were simply off the mark because they ignored the facts and let emotion dictate their decisions. However, as I previously stated, when it is done well, it is a good indicator of both what ought to happen and what actually occurs. As a result, it should be supported, but in Nigeria, it has been distorted. There is a significant discrepancy between what was projected and what really transpired because other types of sentiments have been included in it (Daily Trust, 2023 March 12). The aforementioned expert opinions clarify why the majority of opinion polls' claims of scientific validity and their ability to accurately forecast election results were unconvincing, skewed, or error-driven.

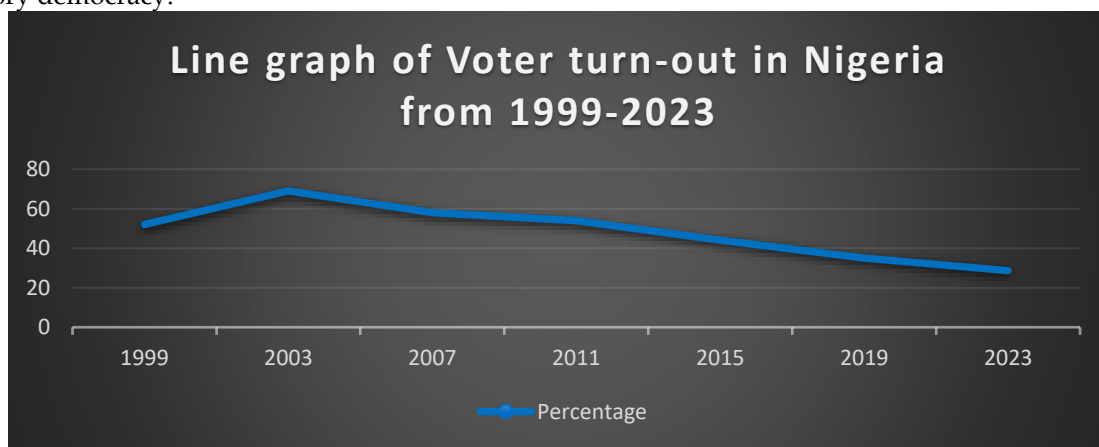
## 5.2. Results and data presentation

**Table 1:** Showing Voter Turnout in National Elections in Nigeria 1999-2023

S/N	Year	Nigeria's Population	Number of Registered Voters	Total Votes Cast	Percentage of Voters Turn Out
1	1999	108,258,350	57,938,945	30,280,052	52%
2	2003	129,934,910	60,823,022	42,081,735	69%
3	2007	131,859,730	65,567,036	35,397,627	58%
4	2011	155,215,570	73,528,040	39,469,484	54%
5	2015	181,562,052	67,422,005	29,432,083	44%
6	2019	200,963,599	84,004,084	28,614,190	35%
7	2023	220,370,010	93,469,008	25,286,616	28.63%

Source: Authors' compilation, 2023.

From the above table, it is evident that increasing voter registration has failed to translate into more voters turning out to choose their leaders. The outcome of the election shows that Bola Ahmed Tinubu of the ruling APC has emerged winner with fewer than 9 million votes which represent 36.61% of the votes cast to govern a country with a population of 220 million people. This is a clear manifestation of the apathetic disposition of Nigerians towards participatory democracy.



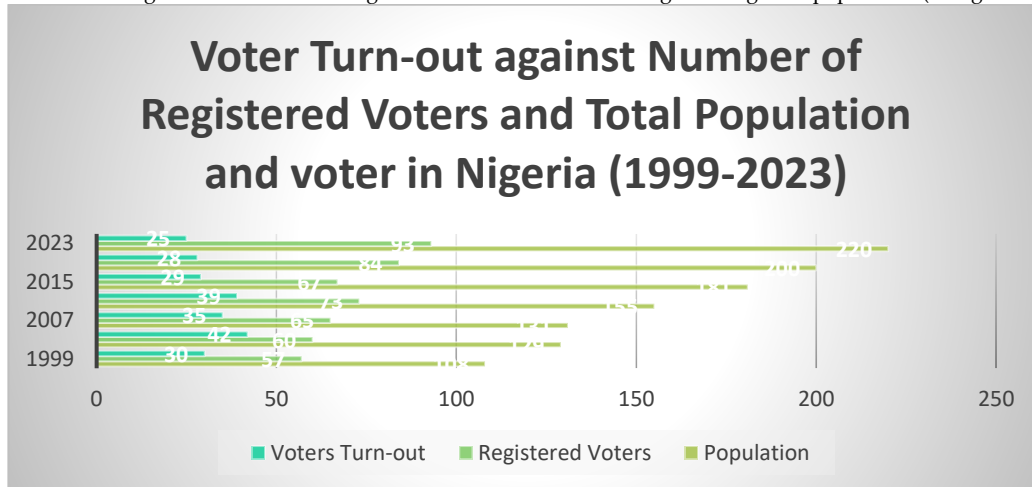
**Figure 1:** Graphical representation of Voter turnout in Nigeria from 1999-2023

Source: Authors' Compilation, 2023.

From the above graph, it is evident that the 2003 election recorded the highest turnout of voters during elections whereas the last general election, 2023, has the lowest. This portrays the level of apathy that has permeated the thought process of Nigerian citizens so far.



Figure 2: A chart showing the total number of registered voters and votes cast against Nigeria's population (all figures in millions).



Source: Authors' Compilation, 2023

The above figure has shown that the 2023 election witnessed the lowest voter turnout in relation to the total number of registered voters in Nigeria.

Table 2: NOI POLLS Presidential Election Survey Results

Poll Question: Suppose the presidential election is being conducted today, who are you likely to vote for?									
	Total (%)	Distribution across Geo-Political Zones						Poll Ranking	
		North	Central	North East	North West	South East	South South	South West	
Peter Obi (LP)	21%	24%	6%	8%	53%	38%	14%	1st	
Bola Tinubu (APC)	13%	16%	16%	20%	1%	3%	15%	2nd	
Atiku Abubakar (PDP)	10%	4%	17%	20%	3%	5%	3%	3rd	
Rabiu Kwankwaso (NNPP)	3%	1%	4%	8%	0%	1%	0%	4th	
Undecided	23%	20%	28%	26%	7%	19%	30%		
Refused	30%	35%	29%	18%	36%	34%	38%		
Total	100%								

Source: NOI-Polls – February, 2023

The above is one of the leading Nigerian Think Tank that is known for conducting surveys and research especially on elections. The survey generated controversy amongst political parties and their candidates. NOI POLL defended its survey by arguing that it was the same methodology they used to correctly predict the 2011, 2015, and 2019 presidential elections. However, the most interesting aspect of their findings is percentage of the undecided voters which was very important for the persuasion and victory of candidates and parties in the 2023 Presidential elections in Nigeria.

### 5.3. Discussion of findings

The 2023 general election is one of the most controversial in Nigeria's political history because the characters, nature of the contest, and the outcome particularly at the presidential level were far below expectations of Nigerians and the international community. However, some issues have impacted the outcome of the election that have to be understood in relation to how they affected the credibility, acceptability, and above all legitimacy of the political process.

The 2023 election was the 7<sup>th</sup> of the election cycles of Nigeria's Fourth Republic that was ushered in 1999. It is expected that the outcome of the election will witness an improvement and build confidence in the Nigerian electoral process. It was INEC that assured Nigerians and the international community of its in-house initiative for voter registration, identification, and transmission of results. The innovation is called the Bi-Modal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS). For off-cycle elections in Ekiti State in April 2022, Osun State in July 2022, Anambra State in November 2021, and the Federal Capital Territory Council Election in January 2022, INEC deployed the BVAS to demonstrate its efficiency. The use of BVAS and live transmission of results in these elections was held as a game changer despite the controversy, particularly of the Osun State governorship election at the tribunal.

It was the failure of INEC to effectively use BVAS in the presidential and governorship elections of February 25<sup>th</sup> and March 18<sup>th</sup> that made the outcome to be considered controversial, unprofessional, and deceitful. In many instances, it was reported that BVAS had faced serious mal-functions in another it was not used, or manipulated by the political actors. The most catastrophic event happened with the INEC Results Viewing (IREV) portal, a special website allowing the public to examine polling unit results as soon as they are finalized on election day. When it came to the presidential election, INEC was unable to deliver on its live-streaming promises and instead complained about technological difficulties. Ironically, INEC claimed that technical difficulties, not election sabotage, were to blame: "It took full responsibility for the problems and regrets the distress that they have caused the candidates, political parties, and the electorates... We wish to assure Nigerians that the results from the Polling Units, copies of which were issued to political parties, are safe on both the BVAS and the IREV portal" (INEC, 2023).

The explanations did not assuage the fears of Nigerians of irregularities and manipulations. Hence, this singular problem tempered with the credibility of the election more than anything else. It created tension and scuffles at the results collation center at the INEC Headquarters Abuja by the party agents and returning officers of the APC and the opposition parties. It openly shows distrust and influenced the opinion of Nigerians and international election observers who suspected foul play. Moreover, the inability of INEC to transmit the Presidential election results live formed the basis of litigations at the Presidential Election Petition Tribunal by the LP and PDP candidates on the outcome of the contest. The IREV glitches were an operational failure by INEC that questioned the transparency of INEC in the electoral process outcome. The final analysis was that the conduct and failure of INEC to meet the expectations of Nigerians affected the election integrity.

In Table 1, the data presented on the Voter Turn Out (VTO) in Nigeria's elections since 1999 has shown that the 2003 elections recorded the highest VTO of 69% of the 42% of the 60.8 million total registered voters. In contrast, the 2023 elections after two decades recorded the lowest VTO of 28% of the 25 million out of 93.4 million registered voters. The VTO is disappointing in the sense that is 25% of registered voters or impliedly representing 20.5% of the total Nigerian population of 200 million people. It does not reflect the reality but can be interpreted as the disenfranchisement of Nigerians with the Federal Government policy of Naira Redesign by the Central Bank of Nigeria. Additionally, there was fuel scarcity in the whole country and prevailing general insecurity that was caused by the Federal Government's negligence, incompetence, and deliberate plan to manipulate the outcome of the elections.

The argument is why would the federal Government implement a cashless policy during the national election which must have a direct and indirect impact on its outcome? While the policy may prevent the problem of the influence of money or money politics and violence it has impacted negatively on voter turnout which is tempered with participation as the political rights of Nigerian citizens. Therefore, the Federal Government's argument and goal or objectives of the cashless policy negatively impacted the conduct and outcome of the elections. Nigerians did not have money to travel, buy food items, and attend to their basic needs of life.

Dozens of opinion polls were conducted before the 2023 general elections using different scales and methodologies. However, most of the polls got it wrong due to a lack of expertise, sentiments, bias, small sample sizes, and timing. The presidential election is where the polls have been followed by Nigerians and international

observers. The most interesting aspect of the opinion polls is that social media has been a platform that the youngest people are familiar with. For instance, Twitter, Telegram, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Google Chat among others. It has been reported as earlier mentioned Peter Obi, the Labour Party's nominee for president was leading in most of the opinion polls both within and outside Nigeria.

Our analysis of most of the polls carried out did not pay much attention to the percentage of the undecided, declined, or refused population like the one conducted by NOI Polls as presented in Table 2. In its election survey of February 2023 on the Presidential Candidates the NOI polls placed Obi, Tinubu, Atiku, and Kwankwaso as the leading front runners in the presidential polls it got correct. On the other hand, placing Obi, Tinubu, Atiku, and Kwankwaso as 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> was not correctly predicted. In terms of regional strength and victory, it largely got it right with slightly wrong predictions. In total out of the six-geopolitical zones Obi, Tinubu, Atiku, and Kwankwaso scored 21%, 13%, 10%, and 3% respectively. The NOI Polls put the number of Undecided at 23% and Refused at 30 percent. This number represents 53 percent of the total score of the entire NOI polls. The four leading presidential candidates scored 47% (NOI Polls, 2023).

The implication of the result of the NOI Poll on the elections was damning. First, a large population of undecided voters could determine the outcome of the elections as swing votes. Secondly, most of the declined or refused participants were neglected by pollsters and Presidential candidates who did not persuade them to vote to influence the outcome of the election.

An important issue to note in the 2023 presidential elections is that the ruling party candidate and the main opposition candidate Bola Ahmed Tinubu and Atiku Abubakar rebuffed public debate. They only attended very few and ignored or avoided many organized by major media organizations like Arise TV, Channels, and AIT among others. It implied that there were issue-based campaigns. The campaign space was dominated by tribalism, religiosity, and regional sentiments. The most dangerous campaigns were done by the imams and pastors on the Muslim/Muslim ticket fielded by the APC, Christians Candidate LP, Northern Candidate PDP, and Kano Candidate Kwankwaso of the NNPP. This tense atmosphere was witnessed throughout the electioneering process up till the declaration of the results of the election. The other problem encountered in elections was the issue of fake news. The Nigerian Fact Check research has uncovered and conducted over 150 election-related fact checks from December 2022 to March 2023. According to the EU Election Observer Mission, there was a record of 10 media attacks on the 18<sup>th</sup> February presidential election and 21 attacks on the 25<sup>th</sup> March governorship election.

Another factor that influenced the outcome of the elections in favor of the ruling party was the politicking of the G-5 Governors of the PDP who insisted on the removal of the party chairman and demanded some concessions from the party leadership. The G-5 Governors are; Rivers: Nyesom Wike, Enugu: Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi, Benue: Samuel Ortom, Oyo: Seyi Makinde, and Abia: Okezie Ikpezu. Their agitations focused on the violations of zonal principles in the party where both the presidential candidate and party chairman are from the North. Secondly, the fallout of the party primaries that gave Atiku victory was not taken lightly by the Wike Camp that later formed the G-5. Thirdly, the politics of the Vice Presidential ticket became the stroke that broke the camel's back. Governor Wike was hopeful and confident of his choice by the PDP Committee will later learn that he was dropped by the PDP presidential candidate on the reason of personality differences and possible clash. In the end, the PDP lost in the presidential election results from the five G-5 Governors states of Rivers, Abia, Oyo, Benue, and Enugu woefully.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This paper examined opinion polls, election surveys, and voter apathy in Nigeria's 2023 Presidential election. The aim of the paper is to interrogate the impact of opinion polls, election surveys, and voter apathy on the outcome of the election. A periodic election is considered the yardstick for measuring the democratic system and practice that gives legitimacy to the government. However, following the return to civil government in 1999, there have been a number of issues with how elections are conducted in Nigeria, including rigging, godfatherism, electoral violence, and legal disputes.

The findings of this paper reveal that the 2023 general elections recorded 28% voter turnout as the lowest percentage of voter participation in the fourth republic of Nigeria's national elections. The cause of the lower voter turnout in the context of the accredited and valid voters was a result of the deployment of BVAS and passage of the new Electoral Act 2022 provisions which stated election can be canceled if conducted without BVAS. The other established reasons for the lower voter turnout were the Central Bank of Nigeria's policy for redesigning the naira and general insecurity in Nigeria. The security situation and economic conditions could not allow the free movement of people to their places of origin and polling units in far and remote areas across Nigeria on time and safely.

A large number of surveys were performed, primarily online, before to the general elections of 2023. These surveys to a greater extent have failed to predict the outcome of the elections correctly. Hence, most of the polls suffered from methodological problems, sample sizes, and biases. Dozens of the polls predicted Peter Obi as the presidential election's victor and the possibility of a second round because of a tighter race without a winner in the first election.

The voter apathy witnessed in the 2023 general elections is caused by many factors and has implications for Nigeria's democratic experiment. The immediate causes were socio-economic conditions in the country while the remote causes were the outcome of the previous elections that many unenlightened Nigerians believe that their votes will not count. The lack of trust and confidence in the electoral empire informed their decisions not to participate in the electoral process by voting. The 2023 election has one of the highest number of litigations 1,200 cases, 578 offences, and 150 fake news disseminated. The most important conclusion is that the reports of over 54 election observer missions and 70 Nigerian Civil Society Situation report expressed disappointment in the outcome of the 2023 general elections. The position drawn from them is that the outcome of the election falls short of the expectations of Nigerians in terms of credibility, transparency, and confidence. Therefore, the 2023 election is taunted with integrity tests by international standards. It was the perception and suspected manipulation of INEC not to transmit the presidential results live via the IREV portal. This was not done as promised due to technical glitches.

The 2023 electioneering campaign was one of the worst in history. This was a result of the ruling party's decision to fill a Muslim/Muslim ticket which undermined the democratic principle of plurality, diversity, and tolerance in a consociational democracy like Nigeria. The campaigns were shifted to religious dominance, propaganda, hate speeches, and violence. The presidential candidates particularly of the two major parties APC and PDP rebuffed issue-based public debate while the Labour Party candidate was seen and accused of using the church structure as his pillar of support.

## **7. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Drawing from the findings and objectives of this paper, the following recommendations suffice: Opinions and election surveys should be carried out systematically and objectively by experts to reflect the wishes and choices of the population; the constitution will be amended to remove the status of Resident Electoral Commissioners (RECs), who are under the authority and direction of the Commission, and replace them with State Directors of Elections. This will improve Nigeria's electoral process. To address various logistical, administrative, and technical issues, INEC should be unbundled as soon as possible. The creation of the Electoral Offenses Commission and Tribunal, the formation of Political Parties Registration and Regulation Commission, a body to manage constituency delimitation, and an improved voter education campaign all require an efficient legal framework.

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