



Electoral and Voter Apathy in the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: This study assessed the impact of political apathy on voter turnout in Nigeria's 2023 general elections, with focus on selected areas including Nasarawa State, the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, and Edo State. The study was motivated by the persistent decline in voter turnout despite increasing voter registration, reflecting growing political disengagement among citizens. Political apathy remains a major challenge to democratic consolidation, as it weakens participation and reduces the legitimacy of electoral outcomes. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design, utilizing both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to registered voters, while secondary data were obtained from academic journals, books, reports from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and other electoral records. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistical tools such as tables, percentages, and charts, focusing on voter turnout trends, trust in electoral institutions, youth participation, and perceived electoral fraud. Anchored on Rational Choice Theory, the study found that low trust in electoral institutions, perceived electoral fraud, electoral violence, and economic constraints significantly contribute to political apathy and declining voter turnout. The findings also revealed that youth participation remains relatively low despite high registration rates, further reinforcing the pattern of disengagement. The study concludes that political apathy has a significant negative impact on voter turnout in Nigeria's 2023 general elections. It recommends strengthening electoral transparency, improving civic education, enhancing security, and addressing socio-economic barriers to restore public confidence and promote active political participation.

Keywords: Political apathy, voter turnout, trust in INEC, electoral fraud.

I. INTRODUCTION

Elections are a fundamental pillar of democratic governance, serving as the primary means through which citizens select leaders and influence public policy. In democratic systems, free, fair, and credible elections promote accountability, legitimacy, and political stability, making voter participation a key indicator of democratic strength.

In Nigeria, electoral practices date back to 1922 and have remained central to political development. However, the electoral process has been challenged by issues such as electoral fraud, violence, manipulation of results, institutional weaknesses, and declining public trust (Albert, 2011; Achinulo, 2020). Despite the return to democratic rule in 1999, voter participation has continued to decline, as seen in the growing gap between registered voters and actual votes cast (Andza&Akuva, 2019).

This decline is closely linked to voter apathy, which refers to citizens' lack of interest or disengagement from political participation. It is reflected in behaviors such as failure to register, refusal to collect Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs), and abstention from voting. In Nigeria, voter apathy is increasingly evident, particularly among youths, despite efforts by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to improve participation (Ogu & Peter, 2023; Salami, 2012).

Rational Choice Theory provides a useful explanation for this trend, as it suggests that individuals participate in elections only when the perceived benefits outweigh the costs. Where elections are seen as lacking credibility due to fraud, violence, or ineffective governance, citizens may rationally choose not to vote.



The 2023 Nigerian General Elections were marked by increased political awareness, youth mobilization, and the introduction of technologies such as BVAS. However, voter turnout was the lowest since 1999 (Ogu & Peter, 2023), indicating persistent mistrust and disengagement.

This study therefore assesses the impact of political apathy on voter turnout in the 2023 general elections, focusing on variables such as voter turnout, trust in INEC, youth participation, and perceived electoral fraud, with emphasis on Nasarawa State, FCT Abuja, and Edo State.

Statement of the Problem

Political participation, particularly voting, is essential for democratic legitimacy. However, declining voter turnout in Nigeria has become a major concern, raising questions about the credibility of elections and the health of the democratic system. Evidence shows a steady increase in voter apathy, reflected in the widening gap between registered voters and actual turnout (Andza & Akuva, 2019; Olalekan, 2020). Despite rising registration, participation has declined, reaching its lowest level in the 2023 general elections.

This is particularly concerning given that the 2023 elections featured increased political awareness, higher youth registration, and new electoral technologies aimed at improving transparency. Yet, turnout remained low, suggesting deeper issues such as distrust in the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), perceived electoral fraud, electoral violence, economic hardship, and the belief that votes do not count (Ighodaro et al., 2022; Clifford et al., 2023).

Voter apathy is also more pronounced among youths, who form a large proportion of registered voters but show lower participation. This trend threatens democratic sustainability by weakening civic engagement and future political participation. From a Rational Choice perspective, many citizens abstain because they perceive the costs of voting to outweigh its benefits, especially where electoral outcomes are seen as unreliable. Despite existing studies, there is limited empirical analysis focusing on the impact of political apathy on voter turnout in the 2023 elections using key variables such as trust in INEC, perceived electoral fraud, and youth participation.

This study addresses this gap by examining the relationship between political apathy and voter turnout in the 2023 general elections, with focus on Nasarawa State, FCT Abuja, and Edo State, with the

aim of providing insights for improving electoral participation in Nigeria.

Research Questions

- i. What are the key factors influencing political apathy and declining voter turnout in Nigeria's 2023 general elections?
- ii. How do trust in the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), youth participation, and perceived electoral fraud affect voter turnout in Nigeria's 2023 general elections?

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to assess the impact of political apathy on voter turnout in Nigeria's 2023 general elections.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

- i. Examine the factors responsible for political apathy and declining voter turnout in Nigeria's 2023 general elections.
- ii. Assess the influence of trust in INEC, youth participation, and perceived electoral fraud on voter turnout in Nigeria's 2023 general elections.

Research Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between political apathy and voter turnout in Nigeria's 2023 general elections.

H₀₂: Trust in INEC, youth participation, and perceived electoral fraud have no significant effect on voter turnout in Nigeria's 2023 general elections.

II. Literature Review

Conceptual Clarification

Election

Elections represent a fundamental mechanism through which citizens in a democratic system select their political leaders and representatives. They serve as a means of expressing popular sovereignty and legitimizing political authority. According to contemporary scholars, elections are institutionalized processes through which citizens participate in governance by choosing among competing candidates or parties under established legal frameworks (Adewumi & Adebogun, 2022; Omotola, 2010).

In Nigeria, elections are conducted periodically at the federal, state, and local government levels under the supervision of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), as provided in the 1999 Constitution (as amended). Free, fair, and credible elections are essential for democratic consolidation, political stability, and accountable governance (Albert, 2011; Omotola, 2010). However, persistent challenges such as electoral



fraud, violence, and declining public trust continue to undermine the effectiveness of elections in achieving these democratic objectives.

Beyond the general understanding of elections, recent studies have provided deeper insights into their evolving nature in developing democracies. In “Elections and Democratic Consolidation in Africa”, Lindberg (2020) argues that elections alone do not guarantee democracy unless they are credible, competitive, and inclusive. He emphasizes that repeated flawed elections can weaken democratic legitimacy rather than strengthen it. Similarly, Norris (2021) in “Electoral Integrity in the 21st Century” posits that the quality of elections measured by transparency, fairness, and institutional trust is more important than mere frequency. She argues that declining public confidence in electoral processes directly affects citizen participation. While both scholars agree on the importance of credible elections, Norris (2021) places stronger emphasis on institutional performance, whereas Lindberg (2020) focuses more on long-term democratic outcomes. These perspectives are highly relevant to Nigeria, where elections are regularly conducted but often criticized for lacking credibility. This suggests that the issue is not the absence of elections, but deficiencies in their conduct, which contributes to declining voter turnout and increasing apathy.

Voters’ Apathy

Voter apathy refers to the lack of interest or disengagement of citizens from political participation, particularly voting. It is commonly reflected in low voter turnout, reluctance to register, and limited involvement in political activities. Scholars identify voter apathy as a major challenge to democratic governance, as it weakens representation and reduces the legitimacy of elected leaders (Yakubu, 2012; Abdullahi & Arabo, 2023). In Nigeria, it is linked to distrust in electoral institutions, perceived electoral fraud, electoral violence, economic hardship, and the belief that votes do not count (Ighodaro et al., 2022; Achinulo, 2020). From a Rational Choice perspective, voter apathy occurs when individuals perceive the costs of voting such as time, risk, and uncertainty to outweigh the expected benefits, leading to non-participation.

Recent empirical literature has expanded the understanding of voter apathy beyond traditional explanations. In “Political Participation and Disengagement in Emerging Democracies”, Dalton (2020) argues that voter apathy is increasingly driven by political distrust and dissatisfaction with

governance outcomes rather than mere ignorance or lack of awareness.

Similarly, Karp and Banducci (2020) in “When Politics Fails: Institutional Trust and Political Participation” contend that citizens withdraw from political participation when they perceive institutions as unresponsive or corrupt. However, Achinulo (2020) maintains that structural factors such as poverty and insecurity are more influential in Nigeria than psychological disengagement alone. While all scholars acknowledge voter apathy as a major issue, Dalton (2020) emphasizes attitudinal factors, whereas Achinulo (2020) stresses structural and socio-economic constraints. In the Nigerian context, voter apathy appears to be a combination of both perspectives structural challenges and institutional distrust making it a multidimensional problem that cannot be explained by a single factor.

General Elections

General elections are nationwide electoral processes through which citizens elect leaders into key political offices such as the President, National Assembly members, Governors, and State Houses of Assembly. In Nigeria, they are conducted every four years and are essential for democratic continuity and leadership renewal. Since 1999, Nigeria’s general elections have been characterized by varying levels of participation and public trust (Adewumi & Adebogun, 2022). However, the 2023 general elections recorded one of the lowest voter turnout rates, highlighting growing voter apathy and concerns about electoral legitimacy (Ogu & Peter, 2023).

Thematic Review

Voter Turnout Trends

Voter turnout refers to the proportion of registered voters who actually participate in an election. It is widely regarded as a key indicator of political engagement and the health of a democratic system. Nigeria has experienced a steady decline in voter turnout over the past decade, despite a continuous increase in the number of registered voters. For instance, voter turnout declined from approximately 54% in 2011 to about 29% in the 2023 general elections (INEC, 2023; Olalekan, 2020). This trend reflects a growing level of voter apathy among Nigerian citizens.

Scholars have attributed declining turnout to several interrelated factors, including perceived electoral fraud, lack of trust in electoral institutions, electoral violence, and economic hardship (Andza & Akuva, 2019; Ighodaro et al., 2022). From a Rational Choice perspective, declining turnout suggests that



many voters perceive limited benefits from participation, leading to a rational decision to abstain.

Recent studies provide more nuanced explanations for declining turnout. In “Explaining Voter Turnout Decline in Africa”, Resnick (2022) argues that turnout decline is linked to unmet democratic expectations and repeated electoral disappointments. Similarly, Bratton (2021) in “Voting and Democratic Citizenship in Africa” finds that citizens are less likely to vote when they perceive elections as ineffective in bringing change. However, Olalekan (2020) attributes declining turnout more to logistical challenges and electoral inefficiencies rather than voter attitudes alone. While logistical challenges are important, the arguments by Resnick (2022) and Bratton (2021) provide a stronger explanation for long-term decline, as they capture the psychological withdrawal of voters a key element of political apathy.

Trust in Electoral Institutions

Trust in electoral institutions, particularly the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), plays a crucial role in shaping voter behavior and electoral participation. Public confidence in the credibility, transparency, and impartiality of electoral bodies is essential for encouraging voter turnout.

Studies indicate that a significant proportion of Nigerian voters exhibit low levels of trust in INEC due to concerns about electoral irregularities, delayed results, and perceived bias (Ogu & Peter, 2023). Survey data from the 2023 elections suggest that a considerable percentage of respondents reported low or very low confidence in the electoral process.

Low institutional trust discourages participation, as voters may perceive their votes as ineffective in influencing outcomes. In line with Rational Choice Theory, such perceptions reduce the expected utility of voting, thereby increasing the likelihood of voter apathy.

In “Trust, Institutions and Political Participation”, Hetherington and Rudolph (2020) argue that institutional trust is a foundational determinant of political engagement. They assert that when trust declines, citizens are more likely to disengage from formal political processes.

Similarly, Norris (2021) emphasizes that perceived electoral integrity directly influences voter turnout. However, Ogu & Peter (2023) suggest that in Nigeria, trust is not only influenced by institutional performance but also by political actors and elite manipulation. This indicates that trust in Nigeria is

both institutional and political, meaning reforms must go beyond INEC to include broader political accountability.

Youth Participation

Youth participation remains a critical issue in Nigeria’s electoral process. Although young people (aged 18–35) constitute a substantial proportion of registered voters, their actual turnout remains comparatively low. Evidence from the 2023 general elections shows that while youths accounted for a significant share of registered voters, their turnout lagged behind that of older age groups (Salami, 2012; Christian, 2023). This disparity highlights a disconnect between political mobilization and actual participation.

Factors contributing to low youth turnout include disillusionment with political leadership, lack of trust in political institutions, security concerns, and the perception that voting does not lead to meaningful change. From a Rational Choice standpoint, many young voters may perceive the costs of participation as outweighing the benefits, leading to disengagement.

Recent contributions highlight changing patterns in youth engagement. In “Youth and Political Engagement in Africa”, Honwana (2021) argues that African youths are not apathetic but are instead engaging through alternative platforms such as social media and activism.

Similarly, Loader et al. (2020) in “Digital Politics and Youth Participation” note that young people are more politically expressive online than through traditional voting. However, Christian (2023) maintains that despite digital engagement, actual voter turnout among youths remains low in Nigeria. While scholars agree that youths are politically aware, they disagree on whether low turnout reflects apathy or a shift in participation style. This suggests that youth apathy in Nigeria may not be absolute disengagement but rather a disconnect between online activism and offline electoral participation.

Perceived Electoral Fraud

Perceived electoral fraud is a major determinant of voter apathy in Nigeria. Concerns about vote rigging, ballot manipulation, and lack of transparency in result collation processes have significantly influenced voter attitudes toward elections.

Empirical studies indicate that a notable proportion of voters cited electoral malpractice as a reason for abstaining from participation in the 2023 general elections (Cliford et al., 2023; Stephenson & Samuel, 2022). Such perceptions undermine



confidence in the electoral system and weaken democratic legitimacy.

The persistence of electoral fraud perceptions creates a cycle of disengagement, where voters become increasingly reluctant to participate in future elections. Within the framework of Rational Choice Theory, the belief that electoral outcomes are predetermined reduces the perceived benefits of voting, making abstention a rational choice.

In “Electoral Malpractice and Democratic Stability”, Birch (2020) argues that perceived electoral fraud has a stronger impact on voter behavior than actual fraud, as perception shapes trust.

Similarly, Norris (2021) notes that even minor irregularities can significantly reduce public confidence in elections. However, Stephenson & Samuel (2022) emphasize that in Nigeria, both perceived and actual fraud coexist, making the problem more severe. This reinforces the idea that addressing electoral fraud in Nigeria requires both institutional reforms and perception management, as public belief alone can discourage participation.

Empirical Review of Related Literature

Causes of Voter Apathy in Nigeria

Empirical studies have consistently identified a range of interrelated factors contributing to voter apathy in Nigeria. These include:

- i. Lack of trust in electoral institutions, particularly the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), has been widely documented as a major determinant of voter apathy. Studies show that when citizens perceive electoral bodies as biased, inefficient, or susceptible to manipulation, their willingness to participate declines significantly (Ogu & Peter, 2023; Yakubu, 2012).
- ii. Perceived electoral fraud remains a critical factor. Concerns about vote rigging, ballot manipulation, and lack of transparency in result collation processes discourage participation (Clifford et al., 2023; Stephenson & Samuel, 2022). When voters believe that election outcomes are predetermined, they are less motivated to engage in the electoral process.
- iii. Electoral violence and insecurity have been identified as strong deterrents to voter participation. The fear of violence at polling units, particularly in politically volatile regions, discourages citizens from exercising their voting rights (Achinulo, 2020; Ighodaro et al., 2022).

iv. Economic hardship plays a significant role in limiting political participation. High levels of poverty and unemployment reduce citizens' ability to prioritize voting, especially when participation involves transportation costs or loss of daily income (Oluwatusin & Abolarin-Egbebi, 2015).

v. Political disinterest and cynicism contribute to voter apathy. Many citizens, particularly youths, express a lack of confidence in political leadership and a belief that their votes do not influence governance outcomes (Abdullahi & Arabo, 2023).

Supporting these factors, Resnick (2022) and Dalton (2020) argue that voter apathy is often cumulative, resulting from repeated cycles of poor governance and electoral dissatisfaction. This suggests that voter apathy in Nigeria is not a one-time reaction but a , reinforcing the relevance of Rational Choice Theory.

Challenges of Voter Apathy

Voter apathy poses significant challenges to democratic consolidation in Nigeria:

- i. Weakening of democratic legitimacy. Low voter turnout raises questions about the representativeness of elected officials and the credibility of electoral outcomes (Adewumi & Adebogun, 2022).
- ii. Youth disengagement. Given that youths constitute a large proportion of the voting population, their low participation undermines political renewal and long-term democratic sustainability (Salami, 2012).
- iii. Policy disconnect between government and citizens. When fewer people participate in elections, elected leaders may be less responsive to public needs, thereby weakening accountability mechanisms.
- iv. Socio-political inequality, as marginalized groups are often underrepresented in the electoral process. This reinforces existing disparities in political influence and access to governance.

Norris (2021) further argues that persistent voter apathy can lead to “democratic backsliding,” where democratic institutions exist but lack active citizen participation. This is particularly relevant to Nigeria, where elections continue to occur, yet citizen engagement is declining.

Consequences of Voter Apathy

Empirical evidence suggests that voter apathy has both immediate and long-term implications for democratic governance in Nigeria.



- i. Decline in voter turnout. Electoral data show a steady drop in participation rates, from approximately 54% in 2011 to about 29% in the 2023 general elections (INEC, 2023; Andza&Akuya, 2019).
- ii. **Entrenchment of corruption and weak accountability.** Low voter participation reduces electoral pressure on political leaders, allowing corrupt practices and poor governance to persist.
- iii. **Erosion of civic culture.** A decline in active political participation weakens

citizens' sense of responsibility and engagement in democratic processes, which are essential for democratic consolidation.

Elections in Nigeria: Trends and Data

Empirical literature on Nigerian elections has extensively analyzed voter turnout patterns across electoral cycles. These studies reveal a consistent decline in voter participation despite increases in voter registration (Olalekan, 2020).

YEAR OF ELECTION	POPULATIONN	REGISTERED VOTERS	ACCREDITED VOTERS	DIFFERENCE (%)
1999	115, 672, 220	57,938,945	30,280,052	52
2003	129, 090, 197	60,823,022	42,018,735	69.08
2007	144, 125, 146	61,567,036	35,397,517	57.4
2011	155,215,570	73,528,040	39,469,484	53.68
2015	181,562,052	67,422,005	29,432,083	43.65
2019	200, 963, 599	82,344,107	28,614,190	34.75
2023	227,882,945	93,470,000	25,286,616	26.72

Source: Alexander &Ogoh, 2023; African Elections Database and INEC, 2023

The Conduct of the 2023 Governorship Elections

The 2023 governorship elections further illustrate regional variations in voter participation and apathy. Factors such as security conditions, electoral logistics, candidate appeal, and public trust in the electoral process influenced turnout across different states.

For instance, electoral developments in Edo State (with relevance to the 2024 governorship election) demonstrate how variations in political competition, institutional performance, and voter perception can significantly affect participation levels (Ogu, 2025).

Table 2: The 2024 Governorship Election Result in Edo State

LGAs	APC	PDP	LP
Igueben	5,907	8,470	494
Esan West	12,952	11,004	342
Owan West	12,277	11,284	201
Uhunmwonde	8,776	9,339	769



Ovia Northeast.	13,225	15,311	1,675
Esan South East	8,398	14,199	98
Egor	16,760	14,658	1,966
Akoko-Edo	34,847	15,865	2,239
Esan Central	10,990	8,616	418
Esan Northeast	10,648	12,522	194
Ovia Southwest	10,150.	10,260	849
Orhionmwon	16,059	14,614	556
Owan East	19,380	14,189	448
Etsako East	20,167	9,683	604
Etsako Central	11,906	8,455	381
Etsako West	32,107.	17,483	2,116
Oredo	30,780.	24,938	5,389
Ikpoba Okha	16,338	26,382	4,026
Total	291,667.	247,274	22,763

Source:Olaniyi et al, 2024)

Summary of Literature Gaps

Although existing literature provides valuable insights into voter turnout, electoral credibility, and political participation in Nigeria, several gaps remain.

First, many studies focus on general trends without providing regionally disaggregated analysis, particularly for states such as Nasarawa, the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, and Edo State.

Second, there is limited empirical integration of key variables such as trust in INEC, youth participation, and perceived electoral fraud within a single analytical framework.

Third, few studies explicitly examine the 2023 general elections as a unique case, despite its significance in terms of technological innovation, heightened political awareness, and record-low voter turnout.

Finally, there is insufficient application of Rational Choice Theory in explaining voter apathy within the Nigerian context, particularly in linking

individual decision-making processes to broader electoral outcomes.

This study seeks to fill these gaps by providing a comprehensive analysis of the impact of political apathy on voter turnout in the 2023 general elections, with specific focus on selected study areas. Additionally, Norris (2021) and Resnick (2022) highlight the need for context-specific studies that integrate institutional trust, political behavior, and socio-economic conditions. This reinforces the gap identified in this study, particularly the lack of integrated analysis focusing on the 2023 elections within specific Nigerian regions.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

Rational Choice Theory explains political behavior by assuming that individuals make decisions based on a logical evaluation of costs and benefits. In the context of voting, citizens are seen as rational actors who will participate in elections only when the perceived benefits outweigh the associated costs.



Recent scholarly contributions have expanded and refined this theory. For instance, Aldrich (2020) argues that voter participation is not purely a civic duty but a calculated decision influenced by institutional trust, perceived efficacy, and expected outcomes. He emphasizes that when individuals believe their vote will not influence results, the likelihood of participation declines. Similarly, Blais and Daoust (2021) highlight that psychological costs such as frustration with the political system or distrust in electoral bodies can significantly discourage turnout.

Further, Smets and Van Ham (2020) contend that socio-political context, particularly in developing democracies, plays a critical role in shaping rational decisions about voting. They note that factors like electoral credibility, transparency, and political accountability directly influence whether citizens see voting as worthwhile. In the African context, Resnick (2022) adds that weak institutional trust and recurring electoral irregularities often increase political apathy, as citizens perceive minimal returns on their electoral participation.

The central argument across these contemporary perspectives is that voting is a function of perceived utility:

- Benefits may include influencing leadership, promoting accountability, or supporting preferred candidates.
- Costs may involve time, logistical challenges, fear of violence, and distrust in electoral processes.

Justification for the Adoption of the Theory

Rational Choice Theory is adopted for this study because it provides a clear framework for understanding why individuals choose to participate or abstain from voting. It is particularly relevant in explaining political apathy, as apathy can be interpreted as a rational response to unfavorable cost-benefit calculations. When voters perceive that their participation will not lead to meaningful change, disengagement becomes a logical outcome.

Application to the Study

In the context of the 2023 Nigerian General Elections, this theory helps explain the observed decline in voter turnout. Several factors align with the assumptions of Rational Choice Theory:

- **Trust in INEC:** Where confidence in the Independent National Electoral Commission is low, voters may perceive

the electoral process as ineffective, reducing the perceived benefit of voting.

- **Perceived Electoral Fraud:** Allegations or fears of manipulation increase the perceived cost of participation, discouraging turnout.
- **Youth Participation:** Many young voters, despite high political awareness, may abstain if they believe their votes will not translate into tangible change.
- **Political Apathy:** Apathy emerges when citizens rationally disengage due to repeated unmet expectations and systemic inefficiencies.

Thus, Rational Choice Theory provides a suitable analytical lens for examining how political apathy influences voter turnout. It connects individual decision-making processes with broader institutional and political realities in Nigeria, particularly within the selected study areas of Nasarawa State, FCT Abuja, and Edo State.

III. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive survey research design, which is appropriate for collecting quantitative and qualitative data on voter behavior, trust in electoral institutions, youth participation, and perceptions of electoral fraud in Nigeria's 2023 general elections. The descriptive survey design enables the researcher to systematically describe and analyze patterns of political apathy and its impact on voter turnout. It allows for the collection of standardized data from a representative sample of respondents, thereby facilitating generalization of findings.

Survey Research Design

A structured questionnaire was administered to registered voters across selected study areas, namely Nasarawa State, the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, and Edo State. The instrument was designed to capture both demographic and attitudinal data, including voter participation, trust in electoral institutions, and perceptions of electoral credibility. This approach supports comparative analysis across variables such as age, gender, and location, while also aligning with Rational Choice Theory, which explains how individuals make voting decisions based on perceived costs and benefits.



Sources of Data

Data for this study were obtained from both primary and secondary sources:

- i. **Primary Data:** Collected through structured questionnaires administered to respondents in the selected study areas. The questionnaire focused on key variables such as voter turnout, trust in the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), perceived electoral fraud, and factors influencing political participation.
- ii. **Secondary Data:** Obtained from relevant textbooks, academic journals, INEC reports, and official electoral statistics. These sources provided information on historical voter turnout trends, electoral outcomes, and documented challenges in Nigeria's electoral process.

on their political relevance and observable voter turnout patterns in the 2023 general elections.

Table 3: Projected Population of Selected LGAs (2025)

S/N	State	Local Area	Government	Projected Population (2025)
1.	Nasarawa State	Lafia LGA		550,000
2.	Nasarawa State	Keffi LGA		150,000
3.	FCT Abuja	Abuja Area (AMAC)	Municipal Council	1,361,243
Total				2,061,243

Source: Naija Details (2025); National Population Commission projections, compiled by the Researcher

Population of the Study

The population of this study comprises registered voters residing in selected Local Government Areas (LGAs) within Nasarawa State and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja.

Specifically, the study focuses on Lafia LGA (Nasarawa State), Keffi LGA (Nasarawa State), Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC) (FCT)

These areas were purposively selected to reflect regional diversity, urban–semi-urban characteristics, and varying patterns of voter turnout observed during the 2023 general elections. Projected population figures for 2025 were adopted to ensure the relevance and contemporaneity of the study.

- **Stratified Sampling:** The population was divided into strata based on LGAs (Lafia, Keffi, and AMAC) to ensure equitable representation.
- **Proportional Random Sampling:** Questionnaires were distributed proportionally across the selected LGAs based on their population sizes.

Sample Size Determination

Given the large population size of approximately 2,061,243, it is impractical to study the entire population. Therefore, a representative sample size was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table.

According to the table, a population exceeding one million requires a minimum sample size of 384 respondents at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. This sample size is considered adequate to ensure the reliability, validity, and generalizability of the findings.

Sampling Techniques

This study adopts a multi-stage sampling technique, combining both probability and non-probability methods to enhance representativeness.

- **Purposive Sampling:** Used to select Nasarawa State and the FCT Abuja based

3.4 Distribution of Questionnaire to Respondents

The distribution of questionnaires across the selected LGAs was determined using Bowley's proportional allocation formula:

$$n_i = \frac{N_i}{N} \times n$$

Where:

- n_i = sample size for each LGA
- N_i = population of each LGA
- N = total population
- n = total sample size (384)



Table 4: Distribution of Questionnaires to Respondents

S/N	Local Government Area	Population (2025)	Sample Size
1	Lafia LGA	550,000	103
2	Keffi LGA	150,000	28
3	Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC)	1,361,243	253
Total		2,061,243	384

Source: Researcher’s computation using Bowley’s proportional allocation formula (2025).

Methods of Data Collection

Data collection for this study involved the following procedures:

- [1]. Designing structured questionnaires comprising both closed-ended and Likert-scale items.
- [2]. Administering questionnaires through both in-person and online methods to ensure wider coverage.
- [3]. Ensuring ethical standards, including informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality of respondents.

Methods of Data Analysis

The data collected were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques.

- **Descriptive Statistics:** Frequencies, percentages, and mean scores were used to summarize data on voter turnout, trust in INEC, youth participation, and perceptions of electoral fraud.
- **Inferential Statistics:** The Chi-square (χ^2) test was employed to test the study’s hypotheses and examine relationships between variables such as voter apathy, institutional trust, and participation.

Data were further presented using tables, bar charts, and line graphs to enhance clarity and interpretation.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This section presents and analyses data collected on voter turnout, voter apathy, youth versus elderly participation, trust in electoral institutions, and factors influencing participation in the 2023 Nigerian general elections. Both primary and

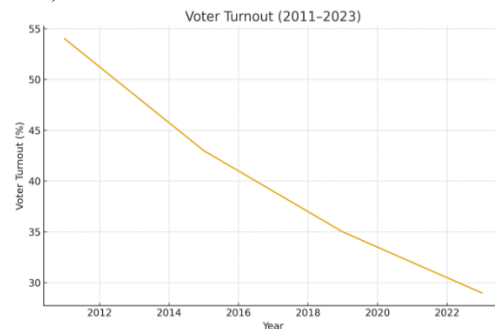
secondary data are utilized, supported by tables and graphical representations to illustrate patterns and trends.

IV. Result and Findings
Voter Turnout Trends (2011–2023)

Table 5: Voter Turnout in Nigeria (2011–2023)

Year	Turnout (%)
2011	54
2015	44
2019	35
2023	27

Fig. 1: Voter Turnout Trend in Nigeria (2011–2023)



Source: Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Official Results of the 2023 General Elections; African Elections Database (2023).

Interpretation:

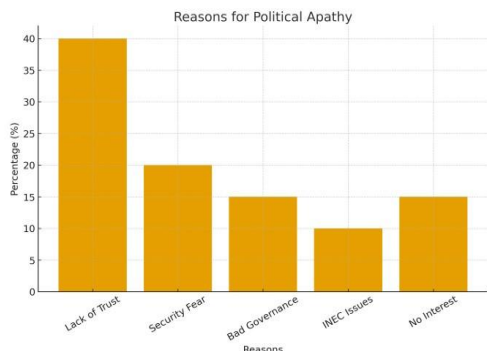
The data show a steady decline in voter turnout from 54% in 2011 to 27% in 2023, indicating increasing voter apathy. Despite growth in registered voters, participation continues to fall, suggesting that registration does not necessarily translate into actual voting.

Causes for Voters’ apathy (2023 Elections)
Table 6: Reasons for Voters’ apathy

Reason	Percentage (%)
Lack of trust in INEC	40
Electoral violence	25
Economic hardship	20
Electoral fraud	15



Fig 2: Reasons for Voters' apathy



Source: Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Official Results of the 2023 General Elections; African Elections Database (2023).

Interpretation:

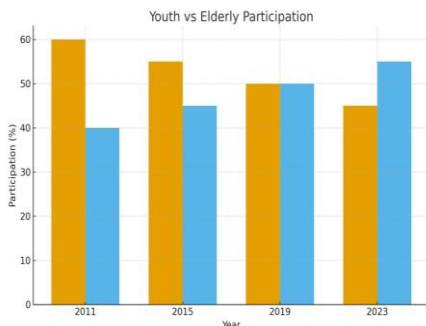
Lack of trust in the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is the major cause of voter apathy, followed by electoral violence, economic hardship, and perceived fraud. This suggests that institutional and security concerns strongly influence voter participation.

Youth vs. Elderly Participation (2023)

Table 7: Participation by Age Group

Age Group	Registered (%)	Turnout (%)
Youth (18–35)	40	25
Elderly (50+)	22	40

Fig. 3: Youth vs. Elderly Participation



Source: INEC) Official Results of the 2023 General Elections; African Elections Database (2023).

Interpretation:

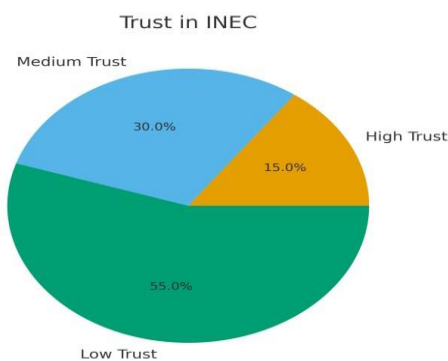
Although youths form the largest share of registered voters, their turnout is significantly lower than that of the elderly. This indicates that voter apathy is more pronounced among younger voters.

Trust Levels in Electoral Institutions (2023)

Table 8: Trust Levels

Trust Level	Share (%)
High Trust	12
Moderate	28
Low	36
Very Low	24

Fig. 4: Trust Levels in Electoral Institutions



Source: INEC Official Results of the 2023 General Elections; African Elections Database (2023).

Interpretation:

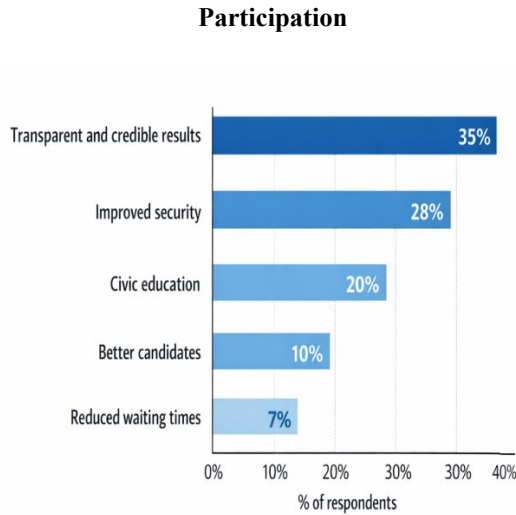
A majority of respondents report low to very low trust in the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). This low confidence is strongly associated with reduced voter turnout.

Factors Encouraging Future Participation
Table9: Factors Encouraging Future Participation

Factor	Percentage (%)
Transparent and credible results	35
Improved security	28
Civic education	20
Better candidates	10
Reduced waiting times	7



Fig. 5: Factors Encouraging Future



Source: INEC Official Results of the 2023 General Elections; African Elections Database (2023).

Interpretation:

Transparency and security are the most important factors for increasing voter turnout. Civic education and candidate quality also influence participation, though to a lesser extent.

Regional Election Data

Table 10: Voter Turnout in Nasarawa State, FCT Abuja and Edo State (2023 General Elections)

State	Registered Voters	Total Votes Cast	Turnout Rate (%)
Nasarawa State	1,899,244	556,937	29.33
FCT Abuja	1,570,000	467,000	29.7

Source: Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Official Results of the 2023 General Elections; African Elections Database (2023).

Insight:

Turnout varies across regions, with Edo State recording the lowest participation. This reflects differences in local factors such as trust, security, and political dynamics.

4.2 Discussion of Findings

The findings highlight the relationship between voters' apathy and voter turnout in Nigeria's 2023 general elections.

4.2.1 Voter Turnout and Apathy

The steady decline in turnout from 2011 to 2023 confirms increasing voter apathy. This supports the study's hypothesis that low participation is driven by disengagement rather than lack of registration. From a Rational Choice perspective, many voters perceive voting as having limited impact.

4.2.2 Trust in INEC

Findings show that low trust in the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) significantly affects participation. When voters lack confidence in the electoral process, they are less likely to vote, reinforcing apathy.

4.2.3 Youth Participation

Despite high registration, youth turnout remains low compared to older voters. This confirms that apathy is more prevalent among young people, likely due to disillusionment and perceived ineffectiveness of voting.

4.2.4 Perceived Electoral Fraud

Perceptions of fraud, alongside violence and economic hardship, contribute to voter apathy. When elections are seen as manipulated or unsafe, participation declines.

4.2.5 Future Participation

Respondents identified transparency, security, and civic education as key factors that can improve turnout. This aligns with Rational Choice Theory, as voters are more likely to participate when benefits outweigh costs.

4.2.6 Regional Observations

Differences in turnout across Nasarawa, FCT Abuja, and Edo State show that voter apathy varies by location. This suggests that solutions should be context-specific.

Summary of Key Findings

- i. Voter turnout has declined despite increasing registration.
- ii. Low trust in electoral institutions contributes to voter apathy.
- iii. Youth participation is significantly lower than that of older voters.
- iv. Electoral fraud and violence discourage participation.



- v. Transparency, security, and civic education can improve turnout.

V. Conclusion

This study examined the impact of political apathy on voter turnout in Nigeria's 2023 general elections, focusing on variables such as trust in the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), youth participation, and perceived electoral fraud. The findings confirm that voter apathy remains a major challenge to democratic participation in Nigeria.

The study revealed a steady decline in voter turnout over the years, reaching a low point in 2023 despite increased voter registration. This indicates that the issue lies not in registration but in citizens' willingness to participate. Factors such as low institutional trust, electoral violence, economic hardship, and perceived fraud were identified as key drivers of apathy.

It was also found that youth participation is relatively low compared to older voters, despite high registration levels, highlighting increasing political disengagement among young citizens. In line with Rational Choice Theory, many voters abstain because they perceive the costs of voting to outweigh its benefits, especially where electoral outcomes are seen as unreliable.

Overall, the study concludes that political apathy has significantly reduced voter turnout in the 2023 elections. Addressing this requires improving electoral credibility, strengthening civic education, and enhancing security to restore public confidence and encourage broader participation in future elections.

VI. Recommendations

In line with the findings of this study, the following policy-oriented recommendations are proposed to address political apathy and improve voter turnout:

For the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)

- Strengthen electoral transparency through effective use of digital result transmission systems and timely publication of results.
- Expand continuous voter education programs, with particular focus on youths, women, and rural populations.
- Enhance security arrangements at polling units in collaboration with relevant security agencies and community stakeholders.

For Political Parties

- Ensure the selection of credible and competent candidates to increase voter confidence and participation.
- Promote internal democracy and transparency to reduce skepticism about party processes.
- Intensify voter mobilization efforts by emphasizing the importance and impact of electoral participation.

For Government and Policy Makers

- Implement policies that reduce socio-economic barriers to voting, including improved infrastructure and access to polling units.
- Support initiatives that encourage political participation, particularly among first-time voters and marginalized groups.

For Civil Society Organizations and the Media

- Collaborate with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to monitor elections and promote accountability.
- Provide accurate information, counter misinformation, and educate citizens on the value of their participation.
- Support community-based civic engagement programs to strengthen democratic culture.

For Citizens (Especially Youths)

- Actively participate in elections and advocate for credible and transparent processes.
- Use digital platforms responsibly to promote voter awareness and encourage civic engagement among peers.

These recommendations are aimed at addressing the underlying causes of political apathy and improving voter turnout. By strengthening institutional trust, enhancing voter awareness, and reducing barriers to participation, they contribute to more inclusive and credible elections in Nigeria.

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