

## **The Nexus of Voters Education and Political Participation in Democratic Nigerian Elections**

**Adewale Adepoju**

Department of History and Diplomatic Studies  
Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun, Ogun State, Nigeria  
Email: [adepojuadewale@gmail.com](mailto:adepojuadewale@gmail.com)  
ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4526-7943>

and

**Oluwasegun Dare Ogunsakin**

Department of Peace and Security Studies  
Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria  
Email: [segunogunsakin4r@gmail.com](mailto:segunogunsakin4r@gmail.com)  
ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0009-0003-0779-2119>

### **Abstract**

This article examines the nexus of voters' education and political participation in the democratic Nigerian elections. The need for the citizens to understand the importance of receiving the right education about elections and also involving in political development must be addressed. Democratic process and people's engagement in elections are important factors to build a country. The effect of voter education will motivate the electorate to participate in various elections in Nigeria. The exploratory research method and secondary data were applied through historical and explorative studies and secondary data from articles, journals, government gazettes, and internet sources. The Nigerian state has witnessed various elections, but some flaws have impeded some of the elections due to low turnout by the people who vote. Nigerian voter education is a non-partisan platform where people can learn more about their rights and responsibilities as voters in Nigeria. Over twenty years after the Fourth Republic of Nigeria in 1999, it is widely believed that while democracy appears to be surviving, development and results have been slow. The essence of maintaining better political participation of the people in elections is connected to the level of voter's education, which can pave way for involvement in peaceful elections in the country. The challenges observed are political interference and lack of funding in strengthening voter education activities by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). This study concludes that the federal government should put in place voters' education mechanism at all levels and create better funding strategy to enlighten the citizenry on the need to get involved in voting activities for the political development in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Election, INEC, Nigeria, Political participation, Voter education.

## **Introduction**

Nigeria, one of Africa's biggest economies and one of the continent's largest oil producers, witnessed outbreaks of deadly violence following the previous presidential election (Asadu, 2023). The nation has a long history of political culture and political participation. After independence in 1960, there were various ways in which Nigerians showed their interest in the democratic process and engaged in political activities (Badero, 2013). Elections and voting are the most important ways to promote democratic values. According to Appadorai (2004), democratic activities require a certain level of ability and character from citizens, who must not lack rational behaviour and active participation in government. In other words, for a country to be democratically capable, its citizens must have a high level of political participation (Onakoya, 2021).

The idea of voter education is to inform voters who are eligible to vote, the rights and obligations to choose where and how to register, how to check voter registers to ensure someone is properly registered, where, when, and how to vote, who are the candidates. Voter education is used broadly to disseminate information, materials, and programmes to educate voters about the particular mechanics of voting to engage in a specific election (Orman, 2010). Mulyata (2011) defines voter education as the education given to voters to participate meaningfully in elections through voting. Voter education can also be described as facilitating the development of personal knowledge, skills, competencies or abilities, values, and behaviour so that they become constructive and personally fulfilling members of society (Ngwoke, 2018). Voter education educates voters about voting crimes such as underage voting, multiple voting, selling and buying voter cards, buying votes or receiving money or gifts for voting, illegal possession of firearms at polling stations, defrauding officials at registration, vandalizing election system, results form, and others, by holding many voter identity cards. Ibeanu and Orji (2014) claim that the main achievements that INEC wanted to achieve through voter education included: increasing voter participation in elections, increasing voter awareness of new procedures for accreditation based on permanent voter cards, and reducing voter turnout, including the number of unannounced vote's legitimate elections, and promoting ethical voting.

One of the basic questions that voter education asks voters is: Why are there elections? Why is our voice important? What is the true purpose of voting? What do we expect from the candidate we choose? These questions are critical to the consolidation and stability of democracy and the people's political participation. Elections are a fundamental process in a democracy. The people provide an opportunity for important debates about the future of a country (Omoera, 2020; International Crisis Group, 2023). Nigeria, Africa's most populous country with more than 210 million people and more than 84 million registered voters holds its general elections every four years (Green, 2023). In every election, citizenship rights and voter education are needed to ensure that all voters, both men and women, understand their rights, their political system, which party they should vote for, and how and where to vote (Kwaja & Sany, 2023). For elections to be successful and democratic, voters must understand their rights and responsibilities and have the proper knowledge and information to cast vote and participate

meaningfully in the electoral process. Voter and civic education are even more important in post-conflict countries where the political situation can be volatile, and elections can have an unprecedented impact on the country's future.

The word voter education is mostly used to describe the dissemination of information, materials, and programmes designed to educate voters concerning the specifics and mechanics of the voting pathways for a particular election (United Nations, 2004). Voter education includes providing information about who is eligible to vote, where and how to register; how voters can check the voter register to ensure they are properly registered; what elections will be held; where, when, and how to vote; who are the candidates; and how to complain (Peacebuilding Initiative, 2008). Political participation is the cornerstone of every country that claims true democracy. These results from increasing awareness among voters that the growth or underdevelopment of their nation determines their will to ensure the right things are done. This includes active participation in the voting process, a willingness to hold elected leaders accountable, and a determination to challenge the authorities through peaceful protest and lobbying when the right thing is not being done. For the first time in 23 years, Nigeria is eliminating the principle of rotation or prioritization of identity to determine candidate emergence. The ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) recently contested the presidential election with Asiawaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu, a southern Muslim, as a presidential candidate and Alhaji Kashim Shettima, a northern Muslim, as the presidential candidate. This sparked debates as religion remains important in Nigerian politics and society.

Contrary to expectations to nominate a southerner, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) nominated a northerner and former vice president, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, as its presidential candidate. However, the candidate had a southern Christian running mate, Governor Ifeanyi Okowa (Erezi, 2022). It was intellectually stimulating to see how voters reacted to this change, while both parties claimed that their selection of candidates was based on a calculation that will ensure victory in the 2023 election (Olorunmola, 2023). No nation can achieve meaningful development without the active participation of the people in governance because there is a strong tendency for leaders to abuse power. The adage that "the power of the people is greater than the people in power" shows that the people remain the 'alpha and omega' of any democratic structure (Ojo, 2020).

The recent elections were held in the context of high levels of state instability (Mohammed, 2022). Parts of the country were not under control due to existing local and regional conflicts that undermined security and hindered free and fair electoral process. The country's six geopolitical zones faced widespread uncertainty. The northern states were beset by years of violence involving extremist jihadist groups, criminal gangs, and other non-state armed groups. In the south, civil unrest continued amid ongoing violence between farmers, herders, and separatist agitators. The situation worsened amid fuel and foreign exchange shortages, adding to the economic hardship for the more than 130 million Nigerians who are classed as multi-dimensionally poor. Uncertainty may even decide whether elections across the country are held on time, as it threatens the safety of voters, voting materials, and poll workers at more than 176,000 polling stations (*Premium*

*Times*, 2023). The need for sustainable and peaceful elections, including active political participation of the people, is essential if Nigeria aims to build a better political system. It is in this context that this article examines the nexus of voters' education and political participation in democratic Nigerian elections.

### **Method**

This study used exploratory research method and secondary data. Secondary data generated from the sources include articles, publications, government gazettes, newspapers and the internet. The engagement of the secondary data was to ensure that all literature connecting to voter education and political participation in democratic Nigerian elections were thoroughly examined. Content analysis was applied to ensure that various gaps were filled during the course of the study. Also, the study relied on participatory democratic theory as a basis for its analysis. In this context, the relevant topics were discussed schematically in selected topics and sub-topics designed to fulfil the objectives stated in the study. The various opinions of people on the need for voters' education were synthesized from materials, including articles that have discussed electoral issues in Nigeria.

### **Theoretical Framework: Participatory Democratic Theory**

Participatory democracy theory offers a useful perspective for considering the effectiveness of participation engineering from a theoretical point of view. As such, participation democracy theory can serve as a basis for defining specific institutional structures that are appropriate for promoting participation and can help link them to levels of political behaviour. Participation theory imagines that citizens participate in large numbers in political decisions and share a sense of responsibility (Zittel & Fuchs, 2007). Its proponents argue that this vision can be achieved by increasing opportunities for participation through institutional reform (Pateman, 1970; Cook & Morgan, 1971; Macpherson, 1977; Bachrach & Botwinick, 1992). Since it was first formulated in the early 1960s, the concept of "participatory democracy" has had many meanings – some complementary, some contradictory. The notion of participatory democracy ranges from deep citizen engagement and procedural reform to the complete transformation of the free democratic system. For some, participatory democracy is an organizational ethos, a set of values for building community spaces that are outside of or at odds with dominant institutions; for others, it is a specific political project aimed at radically reshaping the state and redistributing institutional power (Silva, 2022).

From the participatory democracy theory, the roles played by citizens and representatives here must differ from those in the standard model of representative democracy on engaging in voters' education in building a better understanding of the country's election. In this theory of participatory democracy, citizens are the first to create better literacy on the voting process, balloting, and other electorate elements, which build a better web of political participation without intimidation (Aragonès & Sánchez-Pagés, 2009). Also, the theory of participatory democracy maintains that people make political

decisions, and voters respond by being involved in various actions on approving or rejecting political decisions by voting in upcoming elections.

## **Conceptual Discourse**

### **Election**

Elections are a fundamental process in a democracy. They provide an opportunity for important debates about the future of a country. Free and fair elections help ensure that everyone has a voice in their society (Okorie, 2022). Free and fair elections also help ensure that everyone has the opportunity to make changes for the better. In addition, a credible election process increases the legitimacy of political institutions. They can also increase confidence in elected officials. The process of voting on Election Day jeopardizes the integrity of the election. The integrity of elections is also affected by how inclusive and representative the wider process is (Westminster Foundation for Democracy, 2023).

Democratic government has the "consent of the governed"; elections give practical meaning to this notion of "consent." According to Schumpeter (1942), elections are the heart of democracy. He said it was an "institutional arrangement" to hold public office by contesting the people's vote. According to Olisa Okoli and Nwabufo (1991), elections are a mechanism for selecting individuals for public office or other private positions. According to Gauba (2007), the election is a process by which community or organization members elect one or more individuals to exercise authority on their behalf. The holding of elections in a democracy aims to ensure that the government exercises its power with the consent of the governed. In other words, elections provide legitimacy to government power. Therefore, an election is a process in which members of a group, association, society, community, or organization periodically elect some of its members to occupy positions (Agu, 2015).

Regularly holding free, fair, and credible elections, which allow people to elect their leaders, is a fundamental indicator of democracy. Nigeria returned to democratic rule in 1999 after the military overthrew the democratically elected government of President Shehu Shagari in a 1983 coup (Adebisi, 2021). The 2023 elections, which held in February/March 2023, was the 7th experiment since the country returned to democratic governance. This is the longest period of democratic rule in Nigeria's history and needs to be strengthened. While there are reasons to celebrate, there are challenges the country needs confront head on as it moves toward deepening democratic ethos. For example, the influence of religion and ethnic identity in politics, the cost of politics, and the need to include underrepresented groups in the process.

### **Voters Education**

According to the Open Election Data Initiative (2015), voter education provides potential voters with the information they need to make the right choices at the voting booth. Voter education should also include information on when, where, and how to register to vote and when, where, and how to vote. In voter education, there is clarity on the following for citizenry: 1. register to vote, 2. learn more about the candidates and their voting issues, 3. learn more about their voting options, e.g., when and how did they receive their ballots,

and, 4. find out about important dates and deadlines so they do not miss their chance to vote. According to POLYAS (2017), voter education means equipping citizens of democracies with basic information about how to vote in elections.

The state often carries out voter education through a national election commission, so it is important to be politically impartial. Government agencies like INEC that focus on voter education are often tightly controlled by third parties. In addition, various private institutions are tasked with strengthening democratic values by improving voter education. The focus is often on how to vote, not whom to vote for. Adequate voter education will equip citizens with knowledge about:

1. How to Register to Vote - Most democracies require citizens to register to vote in elections or referendums.
2. How Ballots Are Done – Incorrectly filling out a ballot can result in a person's vote being misinterpreted or deemed invalid in the final count. Therefore, it is important to indicate how the ballot should be filled out correctly and clearly.
3. Electoral system – it is important for citizens to know how their vote will contribute to the final election result. Are elections held proportionally or on a first-past-the-post basis? Is it a more complex preferential voting system?

Voter education is carried out to support election administrators in ensuring free, fair, efficient, and cost-effective elections. It contains basic voter information that every voter must have to arrive at a polling station and vote on the designated election day. Voter education makes voters aware of the importance of participating in elections. Voter education equips citizens with the basic attitudes, behaviours, and knowledge that promote and consolidate democracy. During elections, this training will ensure effective civic organization and activism supporting parties and struggles, civic behaviour appropriate to peaceful elections, acceptance of results, and tolerance of competition and opposition (The Electoral Knowledge Network, n.d).

### **Political Participation**

Political participation is the involvement of citizens in the political system. Eakin, quoted in Adelekan (2010), explains political participation as a process in which an individual plays a role in the political life of his community and has the opportunity to participate in deciding the common goals of society and the best way to achieve them. According to Akamare (2003), political participation is an aspect of political behaviour and focuses on how individuals participate in politics. This is a voluntary activity, and one can participate directly or indirectly. People can participate in the political system by electing or electing political leaders, formulating policies, community activities, and other civic engagements.

According to Awolowo and Aluko (2010), the essence of political participation in any society, whether civilized or primitive, is to control power, gain power, and influence decision-making. Political participation is a means of contribution quotas for the political system and nation-building. Political participation is one of the basic requirements of a democratic government. Therefore, Adelekan (2010) emphasizes that democracy ideally means individual participation in decisions that affect human life. In a democratic



system, citizens must be fully involved in the democratic process of electing rulers and effectively communicating public policies and attitudes. Any claim to a democratic regime or state must involve a high level of competitive freedom to choose, openness and enjoyment of civil and political liberties, and political participation that includes all social groups (Arowolo & Aluko, 2010).

Nigeria is a multicultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious country with a federal structure and a presidential system of government as provided for in the constitution. From 1999 until now, facing the diversity of nations, allocating and distributing resources among different groups of people often presents challenges. Political parties must manage Nigeria's diversity through zoning, with candidates emerging and moving between different zones. Elective office is governed by a "zoning formula," while the federal constitution governs appellate office. Concerns about religion were handled so that if a Muslim or Christian candidate emerged as a presidential candidate, that candidate would come from another faith to ensure balance. However, there have always been alternative opinions in favor of the emergence of the most reliable and capable individuals, regardless of religion or ethnicity (International Crisis Group, 2023).

### **Voters Education and Electioneering in Nigeria**

As a basic principle of democracy, participation is also the main means by which consent is given or revoked in a democracy, and the rulers are held accountable to those who are governed. It is also a means to achieve the democratic goals of equality and freedom of citizens in deciding their cases. Thus, without citizens' active and effective participation in selecting public policies and government apparatus, democracy will become a sham (Inokoba & Kalagbor, 2016). Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is primarily responsible for political education. Given the highly political nature of elections, it is critical that government-sponsored citizenship education is neutral, accurate, and does not appear to favor any party or candidate. Many other groups can also make valuable contributions to political education. Women's organizations and other non-governmental organizations can be very effective in developing gender-sensitive messages that promote positive images of women as full and equal participants in government, including as politicians and national leaders. Mostly, women's groups have been very effective in educating the public about political participation related to elections and mobilizing public opinion to maintain peaceful polls. Political parties are often in the best position to provide information about candidates and specific issues, including those that specifically affect women. The media can play a key duty in breaking negative stereotypes about women and promoting their full participation. The international community can also constructively contribute to civic education based on its extensive experience promoting women's electoral participation in various countries (Brechanmacher & Hubbard, 2020).

LASIEC (2011) describes "voter education as a practical strategy to increase voter awareness of their socio-political responsibilities, to internalize universal voting practices and voting procedures acceptable in a country." Added that this voter education should have the following objectives: 1. voters' basic awareness of the electoral process, electoral

process, and other civic duties and obligations. 2. educating voters against election abuses such as hooliganism, election violence, erasing and confiscating ballot boxes, and duplicating and falsifying results. 3. educate members of political parties and other key stakeholders on relevant election policies, rules and regulations, constitutional provisions, and laws governing electoral practice. 4. Educating voters about the benefits and impacts of democratic government and its features, such as regular and nationwide elections. In short, voter education educates the public about their democratic rights, electoral procedures, candidacy, issues related to the electoral process, and credible elections. For example, individuals can influence elections (especially local elections) simply by telling friends, neighbours, colleagues, and others where candidates stand on issues that are important to them (Ayinde, 2019). For example, considering elections to be an important tool for promoting the democratic process, most Nigerians are not enthusiastic about participating fully in the electoral process and politics. Thus, INEC's statistics after the 2019 general election are as shown in Table 1:

Table 1: Breakdown of voter's involvement in the political process during 2019 election

S/N	Voters Index	Total
1	Total number of registered voters	84,004,084
2	Total number of registered voters (as collated)	82,344,107
3	Total number of accredited voters (as collated)	29,364,209
4	Total number of valid votes (as collated)	27,324,583
5	Total number of rejected votes (as collated)	1,289,607
6	Total number of votes cast (as collated)	28,614,190
7	Percentage turn out (as collated)	35.66

**Source: INEC Website in Akeem and Hamzat, 2020.**

We must understand that ballots rejected during vote counting are often blamed on poor citizenship and voter education. More than one million votes in Nigeria's 2011 presidential election were rejected during the counting, especially because the ballots were marked incorrectly. The rejected votes accounted for about 3.2% of all votes in this election. According to observers, this figure is high and could be much lower with proper voter education (Ibeanu & Orji, 2014). At the same time, voter turnout in Nigerian elections has fallen dramatically. For example, the turnout in the 2019 presidential election fell to 35% from 44% in the 2015 election. This 44% turnout was also lower than 54% in the 2011 election. In fact, statistics show that the turnout in Nigeria's presidential election has decreased since 2003 (International Institute of Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2023).



POLYAS (2017) maintains that voter education means providing democratic citizens with basic information about how to participate in elections. State institutions often carry out voter education with the content of public education and national orientation. United Nations (2018) states that voter education includes providing information about who has the right to vote, where and how to register, how voters can check the voter register to ensure they are properly registered, what elections will be held, where, when, and how to vote, who the candidates are. Voter education aims to provide all citizens and those involved in the democratic process with appropriate awareness and information and make it accessible. Any good voter education campaign should aim to achieve universal voter coverage, reaching disadvantaged groups and mainstream voters.

It should also recognize differences in illiteracy, language, religion, culture, and ethnicity in a country, even if there is only one official language, e.g., English in Nigeria. Minority, internally displaced persons, and other marginalized sections of society must receive special attention. Voters must be taught how to register and vote. Voter education must also include mass mobilization of the public to participate fully during the electoral process, especially by encouraging them to vote and avoiding violence (United Nations, 2018). A good voter education initiative should encourage weak and vulnerable people, such as women, to participate in the electoral process (Ogbu, 2020). It should be clear that the right to vote is universal. It should help create a culture where women and other minority groups are encouraged to participate in the electoral process and are welcomed. For example, it must be emphasized that women have the same voting rights as men.

### **Implications of Voters Education on Political Participation in Nigerian Elections**

Active voter engagement is the essence of a good democracy. Well-informed voters are more civically and politically engaged and more likely to elect and hold their representatives accountable in elections (Omoera, 2009; International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2023). Effective voter education efforts are critical to ensuring that all potential voters have the necessary information to exercise their right to vote and understand and trust the entire electoral process. International law is drawing increasing attention to the need for inclusive voter education campaigns that guarantee informed voters. The content of voter education campaigns must not be limited to election registration and logistics but must also raise citizens' awareness of their democratic rights and fundamental freedoms and the international obligations they contain. Several potential sources, including state actors such as election administrators, political parties, and civil society, can provide voter education. Regardless of the organization providing voter education, efforts should be made to ensure that all potential voters – including women, minorities, and persons with disabilities – have access to this information (Election Standards at the Carter Centre, nd). According to Nigerian Finder (2023), the following are the importance of voters' education in Nigeria:

**Motivating Registered Voters to Vote both in General and State Elections**

The main challenge in elections in Nigeria is the low turnout on election day. For instance, the Nigerian 2019 INEC general election saw 84,004,084 registered voters, but the turnout was only 49.78%, below half of those eligible to vote. Voter education is a strategy that can be used to increase voter turnout in Nigerian elections. Voter education educates voters about the importance of voting and why they should vote. At the time of writing, an estimated 105,841,979 people in Nigeria are over 18. Therefore, increased voter education efforts in Nigeria greatly increase voter turnout in the 2023 general elections.

**Establish Voting Fundamental Rights Information**

An important role of voter education in Nigeria is to create awareness about what makes citizens of the country entitled or not entitled. Voters are provided with adequate information about what must be done to be able to vote and what could prevent them from voting on Election Day. The voter education program instructs voters to go to a polling station where their names will be entered on the voter list. During the voter education program, voters are advised to bring a Permanent Voter Card (PVC) because Temporary Voter Cards (TVC) are not accepted.

**Demonstrating Voter Responsibility Awareness**

Since there are usually no rights without obligations, voter education requires voters to know what is needed before, during, and after the election process. If voters know and take up this responsibility, they can contribute to electoral success. Therefore, voter education ensures that eligible voters understand what is expected during the electoral process. Voter education provides relevant information on voter registration. Voter education will provide voters with information on registering, including moving polling stations from one part of the country to another. In addition, voter education creates awareness of how to vote correctly. When voters are not instructed on voting properly, they usually do so incorrectly, making the vote invalid. In this way, options training reduces the likelihood of these avoidable errors.

**Establish Awareness of the Consequences of Various Electoral Lawlessness**

To achieve that the election is peaceful, fair, and free, there are instructions put in place per the Electoral Act 2010 (as amended) and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Regulation Guidelines for the Conduct of Elections Section 117 to 132 of the Electoral Act 2010 (as amended) stated electoral offenses and associated penalties for defaulters. It is, therefore, the function of voter education to teach voters how to conduct themselves to curb the occurrence of electoral offenses. The electorates themselves to avoid the event of electoral crimes. Through voter education awareness programs, the electorate will learn what constitutes electoral offenses and penalties. The crimes, according to the Act, include snatching or damaging a ballot box, acting or inciting others to act in a disorderly manner, threats on political aspirants, curbing the exercise of the right to vote through kidnapping or duress, forging or destroying a nomination booklet or result form, providing fake information during registration,

multiple registrations, impersonating registration personnel and forging a registration card, among other crimes (Nasiru, 2019; Ochei, 2023). The penalties for these offenses are also made known to the voting people through voter education.

### **Offer Needed Information on the Management of Polling Units of Registered Voters**

Situations that take a voter away from the constituency where they had registered in the general prevention election might occur. However, most times, the voters must learn how to apply for their recently registered constituency to be moved. In ignorance, the voter may register in their new change location. In ignorance, the voter decides to register in their new residence. However, this intentional multiple-voter registration action is an offense against voter registration, as stated in Section 117 of the Electoral Act 2010 (as amended). A voter who defaults will likely face a fine of ₦100,000 or imprisonment for up to one year or both. Through voter education, people can receive important guidelines on transferring from one registration centre to another. The voter would learn to include the moved and what documents to attach to the application. INEC organizes several voter education campaigns nationwide. There are INEC Youth Ambassadors who carry out voter education across Nigeria.

### **How other Bodies in Nigeria are Handling Voter Education**

**Religious Faiths:** The various religious bodies in Nigeria engaged in educating and promoting voters on the need to participate in elections. For instance, the Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC), through its Ecumenism for Development and Peace Initiative (EDAPI), partnered with the Community Life Project to organize a national workshop on civil rights sensitization and voter education for religious leaders (Uzokwe, 2023). Various religious communities aim to engage spiritual leaders to develop their civic and voter education skills as citizens. The faith bodies create opportunities during Jumat and Sunday service that members should follow their conscience in voting and ensure that they are not intimidated during voting. The development of attitude in supporting the democracy of the country is important, and this are made known to various religious bodies in the country.

**Non-Governmental Organizations:** There is a massive movement by non-governmental organizations such as the Vote Count Campaign Organization, which is calling on the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to undertake extensive voter education programs and community-based election advocacy programs to provide useful information to voters to make informed decisions during election time (Okoronkwo & Nwachukwu, 2023). Also, The Democracy Corner platform strengthened civic education, citizen trust, and citizen engagement during 2023 and beyond to educate citizens about their rights and provide citizens with information about ways to hold elected officials accountable for their performance in office (*Premium Times*, 2021). Also, the National Youths Service Corp members of the CDS Voter Education Group conducted information campaigns at high schools, community centres, sporting events markets, and religious institutions in some states in Nigeria. CDS groups sensitize their peers on

meaningfully participating in elections by disseminating information on how to register to vote and how to obtain information about the platforms of specific candidates and political parties to encourage them to vote in elections (European Union, n.d.).

**Political Parties Conduct:** Political parties involve people in the community through political mobilization to reduce social tensions and increase the sound of the group structure they build (Sirivunnabood, 2016). In other words, political parties aim to shape and influence political events while ensuring democracy and political competence. In Nigeria, the various political parties must provide accurate and correct political knowledge, for example, increasing political awareness and political participation by encouraging people to vote for political parties that represent their preferred policies rather than voting for individuals and, monitoring the electoral environment and reporting whenever election fraud is detected. Political parties are responsible for promoting voters' education.

### **Challenges of Voters Education and Political Participation in Democratic Nigeria**

Within the political system, citizens can engage in political processes and decision-making by joining political parties, voting in elections, participating in election campaigns, conducting public affairs, and other political activities (Omoera, 2010; Falade, 2014). The level and pattern of citizens' political participation determine the success of the political system. In Nigeria, many people see politics as a dirty game to be avoided. It is a consequence of the undemocratic tendencies, deceit, violence, and insecurity that characterize the political system. Professor Attairu Jega, former Chair of INEC, commented on the political apathy that was being dumped on the part of Nigerians during the 2011 general election:

**Voter's Apathy:** The voter apathy in Nigeria is no longer disputed. Voter turnout in recent general elections provides scientific and empirical evidence of voter apathy and disinterest in elections among sections of the electorate (Agaigbe, 2019). This pressing scenario has implications for public participation and governance (Odebode, 2011, p.2). Interestingly, INEC has made several upward strides in recent years with the passage of the 2022 Election Act, the Continuous Voter Registration (CVR) exercise, which has been rolled out to 8,809 Wards or Registration Area Centers (RAC) across the country. All of this is supported by high-tech innovations, including the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV), the INEC Voter Enrollment Device (IVED), and the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) (Yusuf, 2023). Ensuring the electronic delivery of results and the above process will help INEC make transparency a key ingredient in the upcoming elections in Nigeria. One of the challenges they face is voter apathy. What is concerning, despite mass demonstrations during the election campaign, the number of voters in the 1999 presidential election was only 52.3%. It rose to 69.1% in 2003 before falling further to a low of only 34.75% in 2019! (Adigun, 2020). Many voters may feel their voices are not counted.

The third major challenge is more information and education about the electoral process. Although INEC has statutory obligations to provide civic and election education

and promote knowledge of sound democratic processes, and although Commissions usually allocate resources and receive support from development partners to conduct voter education and outreach, these resources are often insufficient (Dazang, 2022). It does not help that the main actors and beneficiaries of the process, namely political parties, rarely invest their resources in voter education. When we add to this unfortunate situation that we are dealing with voters who are largely illiterate and stricken with dire poverty, voter education becomes difficult. The task of voter education is becoming more difficult, given the many activities and innovations introduced by the INEC that must be explained clearly to voters (Dazang, 2022).

Another critical issue we must deal with is brash trading and vote buying. It was reported during the FCT regional council and gubernatorial election in Ekiti state in 2022 (Vanguard Newspaper, 2022). Such electoral malpractice violates the legal ethics of elections. This eliminates the voter's choice because otherwise, no more credible candidate can emerge other than the people's choice. However, it is encouraging to know that INEC intends to deploy a special masked security agency to monitor and combat vote buying at polling stations. Before the 2023 general election, challenges related to insufficient funds, workforce, and training must be identified and resolved urgently. Adequate security is another critical issue that must be mastered before turning into a monster with the head of a hydra that will not be caved in by those who wish to win elections by force, even in 21st-century Nigeria (Baje, 2022). Meanwhile, in a country where resources are limited, everything seems to work. In a country where the political class has failed to positively impact lives through good governance, most Nigerians are likely to walk away from elections out of anger. That is, unless, of course, there is a concerted effort to deter them. The good news is that the 2022 Electoral Act has strengthened the Commission and provided the electoral process with more transparent steps to ensure Nigeria's vote is ultimately counted (Gabriel, 2022). However, they will not be enough. The commission and other stakeholders must revitalize and restore the confidence of the Nigerian people in the electoral process.

## **Conclusion**

This study has explored the nexus of voters' education and political participation in the Nigerian election. The importance and necessity of voter education are very important for the political participation of the people in Nigeria. Nigerian voters must be trained to vote freely and independently for credible leaders. They should be educated about election crimes like underage voting. They should know why they chose it because the electoral process is so important to democracy, with voters being the key players. Therefore, voters must receive adequate information and protection to promote credible elections. Voter education, as the name implies, is a combination of activities designed to help voters make rational decisions about candidates and electoral action and then make those decisions accurately, efficiently, and correctly when they vote. This includes informing voters about the candidate, what the ballot looks like, how to use the voting machine, where the polling stations are located, how to register, and how to vote properly



to register for free and fair elections, leading to an advantage for sustainable democracy in Nigeria.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to achieve a successful voter's education and political participation of the people before and during elections in Nigeria: The federal government of Nigeria should develop and disseminate comprehensive civic and voter education programmes that begin well before each election and continue throughout the electoral process, ensuring that the material used is politically accurate and neutral. Government and stakeholders should provide sufficient resources to ensure that the programmes reach all eligible citizens. The relevant government agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) should initiate special voter turnout and civic education programmes for target groups, including women, minorities, displaced persons, youth, among others, who are less likely to vote. Civic societies must support gender-sensitive voter education programmes and ensure the full participation of people in their development and dissemination.

### References

- Adebiyi, K. (2021, November 12). We must nurture this democracy to flourish in Nigeria. <https://www.thecable.ng/we-must-nurture-this-democracy-to-flourish-in-nigeria>
- Adelekan, A.T. (2010). *Effects of role-play and moral Dilemma Techniques on Secondary School Students' Achievement in and Attitude to Political Education*. Ph.D. thesis, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria.
- Adigun, O.W. (2020). The factors determining voter turnouts in presidential elections in Nigeria: Multivariate correlation analysis of the 2019 presidential election. *Open Political Science*. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3908213>
- Agaigbe, F.M. (2019). *Voter apathy and voter turnout in the 2015 general elections: The Benue state experience*. The Electoral Institute, INEC, Abuja.
- Agu, C.F. (2015). Democracy, election and political participation in Nigeria: 1999-2011. *Journal of Policy and Development Studies*, 9(5), 110-119.
- Akamare, B.O (2003). Political participation: Issues and perspectives. *Commonwealth Journal of Social Sciences*, 3(6), 12-24.
- Akeem, A.G., and Hamzat, I.R. (2020). An insight into challenges of voters' participation and attainment of sustainable democracy in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Social Studies*, 23(2), 78-93
- Appadorai, A. (2004). *The substance of politics (fourth impression)*. Oxford University Press.
- Aragonès, E., & Sánchez-Pagés, S. (2009). A theory of participatory democracy based on the real case of Porto Alegre. *European Economic Review*, 53(1), 56-72.
- Arowolo, D. & Aluko, F.S. (2010) Women and political participation in Nigeria. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 14(4), 581-593.

- Asadu, C. (2023, March 1). *Nigeria's Bola Tinubu declared winner of presidential vote*. <https://apnews.com/article/nigeria-election-africa-vote-tinubu-5687e6b1929e0ee95794cebb68621f99>
- Ayinde, Y. I. (2019). Voters' education: A tool for credible election in Nigeria. *Zaria Journal of Educational Studies (ZAJES)*, 20(1), 54-60.
- Badero, S. (2013). *Political Culture of the rural people: A case of some selected rural communities in Lagos State*. Department of Political Science, Bayero University, Kano.
- Bachrach, P. & Botwinick, A. (1992). *Power and empowerment. A radical theory of participatory democracy*. Temple University Press.
- Baje, A.O. (2022, October 8). *Back to voter education*. <https://businessday.ng/backpage/article/back-to-voters-education/>
- Brechanmacher, S., & Hubbard, C. (2020, March 24). *Breaking the cycle of gender exclusion in political party development*. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/03/24/breaking-cycle-of-gender-exclusion-in-political-party-development-pub-81345>
- Cook, T.E. & Morgan, P.M. (Eds.) (1971). *Participatory democracy*. Canfield Press.
- Dazang, N. (2022, March 28). *The case for massive voter education*. <https://guardian.ng/opinion/the-case-for-massive-voter-education/>
- Election Standards at the Carter Centre. (nd). *Voter education*. <https://eos.cartercenter.org/parts/9>
- The Electoral Knowledge Network. (n.d). *Civic and voter education*. [https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/ve/explore\\_topic\\_new](https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/ve/explore_topic_new)
- Erezi, D. (2022, June 16). Atiku dumps Wike, chooses Okowa as running mate for presidential election. <https://guardian.ng/news/atiku-dumps-wike-chooses-okowa-as-running-mate/>
- European Union. (n.d.). *Voter education outreaches at LGAs in Imo, Osun and FCT – November 2018 – February 2019*. <http://democracy-support.eu/nigeria/posts/voter-education-outreaches-at-lgas-in-imo-osun-and-fct>
- Gabriel, C. (2022, September 27). *Electoral act 2022: implication and developmental trend it brings to electoral process in Nigeria*. <https://businessday.ng/politics/article/electoral-act-2022-implication-and-developmental-trend-it-brings-to-electoral-process-in-nigeria/>
- Gaub, O.P (2007). *Introduction to political theory (4th edition)*. Macmillan Publishers Ltd.
- LASIEC (Lagos State Independent Electoral, 2011). *Local government election petition time limit for determination of lifeline available to a petitioner, in the local government election petition appeal tribunal of Lagos State*.
- Ibeanu, O., & Orji, N. (2014). *Approaches to civic and voter education: Nigeria's experience in comparative perspective*. Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)
- Inokoba, P.K., & Kalagbor, S.B. (2016). Political participation and grassroots democracy in Nigeria: insights from Kolokuma/Opokuma Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. *University of Nigeria Journal of Political Economy*, 9(2), 266-278.



- International Crisis Group. (2023). Mitigating risks of violence in Nigeria's 2023 elections. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/311-mitigating-risks-violence-nigerias-2023-elections>
- International Foundation for Electoral Systems. (2023). *Voter education & outreach* <https://www.ifes.org/our-expertise/election-integrity/voter-education-outreach>
- International Institute of Democracy and Electoral Assistance. (2023). *Nigeria*. <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/country-view/231/40>
- Kwaja, C., & Sany, J. (2023, February 16). *A key election for Nigeria raises a rising demand: inclusion*. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/02/key-election-nigeria-raises-rising-demand-inclusion>
- Macpherson, C.B. (1977). *The life and times of liberal democracy*. Oxford University Press
- Mohammed, I. (2022, November). "No peace, no election": Will insecurity undermine Nigeria's 2023 general elections? <http://democracyinafrica.org/no-peace-no-election-will-insecurity-undermine-nigerias-2023-general-elections/>
- Nigerian Finder. (2019). *Importance of voters' education in Nigeria*. <https://nigerianfinder.com/importance-of-voter-education-in-nigeria/>
- Mulyata, H. (2011). *The impact of voter education on voter participation: The case of Kaunda Square Stage (1) Compound in Lusaka*. Master's thesis, University of Zambia.
- Nasiru. (2019, February 18). *Snatching of ballot boxes- Here's what the law prescribes for offenders*. <https://www.thecable.ng/snatching-of-ballot-boxes-heres-what-the-law-prescribes-for-offenders>
- Ngwoke, (2018). Voter's education and readiness to vote in 2019 general election in Nigeria: Empirical Survey. *Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies (SGOJAHDS)*, 1(1), 52-60.
- Ochei, A. (2023, February 23). *Votes, not crime: 2023 election offences that can land you in prison*. <https://businessday.ng/news/legal-business/article/votes-not-crime-2023-election-offences-that-can-land-you-in-prison/>
- Ogbu, S.U. (2020). Role of voter education in curbing electoral violence in the 2019 general elections in Enugu state, Nigeria. *Global Journal of Political Science and Administration*, 8(5), 24-38.
- Olisa, M.O., Okoli, E., & Nwabufu, E. (1991). *Government for senior secondary schools*. Africana - FEP Publishers Ltd.
- Olorunmola, A. (2023). *Nigeria and the 2023 general elections*. <https://www.wfd.org/commentary/nigeria-and-2023-general-elections>
- Ojo, J. (2020, September 6). *Political participation and good governance: The Nigerian experiment*. <https://www.thecable.ng/political-participation-and-good-governance-the-nigerian-experiment>
- Okorie, L. (2022). *The role of citizens in ensuring free and fair elections*. <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2022/11/28/the-role-of-citizens-in-ensuring-free-and-fair-elections/>

- Okoronkwo, O., & Nwachukwu, A. (2023, January 17). *NGO advocates massive voter education*. <https://radionigeria.gov.ng/2023/01/17/ngo-advocates-massive-voter-education/>
- Omoera, O.S. (2010). The import of the media in an emerging democracy: An evaluation of the Nigerian situation. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 22 (1), 33-38. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09718923.2010.11892781>
- Omoera, O.S. (2009). Ideological bankruptcy in political media broadcast in Nigeria: An appraisal of the 1999, 2003 and 2007 presidential elections campaigns. *LASU Journal of Humanities*, 6, 77-85.
- Onakoya, A. (2021). Political participation and rural dwellers in Nigeria: a review of the 2015 general elections in Ibeju-Lekki area of Lagos State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Management, Social Sciences, Peace and Conflict Studies*, 4(1), 275-287.
- Open Election Data Initiative. (2015). *Section 3: Key election process categories: Voter education*. <https://openelectiondata.net/en/guide/key-categories/voter-education/>
- Orman, C. (2010). *Does an Increase in Education Increase Electoral Participation in Indonesia?* PhD thesis, Georgetown University Washington.
- Pateman, C. (1970). *Participation and democratic theory*. Cambridge University Press
- Peacebuilding Initiative. (2008). *Electoral processes & political parties: Actors & activities*. <http://www.peacebuildinginitiative.org/indexe2c9.html?pageId=1944>
- POLYAS. (2017). *Voter education*. <https://www.polyas.com/election-glossary/voter-education>.
- Premium Times. (2023, February 24). #NigeriaDecides2023: Five factors that could determine Nigeria's elections – CDD. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/more-news/583879-nigeriadecides2023-five-factors-that-could-determine-nigerias-elections-cdd.html>
- Premium Times. (2021, July 5). *Nigeria democracy corner project: NDI requests NGOs to apply for grant*. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/promoted/471707-nigeria-democracy-corner-project-ndi-requests-ngos-to-apply-for-grant.html?tztc=1>
- Schumpeter, J. (1942). *Capitalism, socialism and democracy*. Allen and Unwin.
- Silva, N.R. (2022). *What is participatory democracy? Theory, activism, and power*. Brooklyn Institute for Social Research.
- Sirivunnabood, P. (2016). Political education: The role of political parties. *Silpakorn University Journal of Social Sciences, Humanities, and Arts*, 16(3), 157-194.
- Stokes, S.C. (1999). Political parties and democracy. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2, 243-26.
- United Nations. (2018, 15 March). *Voter & civic education: Guide to promoting the participation of women in elections*. [www.un.org:https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/publication/WomenAndElections.pdf](https://www.un.org:https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/publication/WomenAndElections.pdf)
- United Nations. (2004). *Voter and civic education*. <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/publication/Chapter5.htm>

- Uzokwe, O. (2023, February 25). *Groups enlighten religious leaders on voter education, civic rights*. <https://guardian.ng/news/groups-enlighten-religious-leaders-on-voter-education-civic-rights/>
- Vanguard Newspaper. (2022, June 19). *Ekiti election: Prosecute vote-buyers or face legal action, SERAP tells INEC*. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/06/ekiti-election-prosecute-vote-buyers-or-face-legal-action-serap-tells-inec/>
- Westminster Foundation for Democracy (2023). *Elections*. <https://www.wfd.org/elections>
- Yusuf. (2023, March 3). *Analysis: Trend of low voter turnout continues in Nigerian elections*. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/586193-analysis-trend-of-low-voter-turnout-continues-in-nigerian-elections.html>
- Zittel, T., & Fuchs, D. (2007). *Participatory democracy and political participation*. Routledge.