

**AN ASSESSMENT OF THE ROLE OF CITIZENS'  
PARTICIPATION IN ELECTORAL PROCESS IN NIGERIA: A  
STUDY OF 2016 GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION IN EDO STATE**

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**ABSTRACT:**

This paper did an assessment of the role of citizens' participation in the electoral process in Nigeria with specific focus on the 2016 governorship election in Edo State. It demonstrated the application of content analysis as a methodological tool especially in data collection in social research. Three assumptions were formulated while a number of variables isolated to give direction to the data collection for the study. Data were collected from four Nigerian newspapers. The data were quantitatively analyzed by percentaging. Among our major findings are citizens' trust in political parties; provision of adequate security during elections; and power of incumbency as being prominent among the factors that influenced citizens' participation in the process of the 2016 governorship election in Edo State. It was recommended among other things that political parties should build trust in the electorate; parties should use their incumbency to implement people-friendly policies and programmes; and adequate security should be provided during election similar to what was experienced in the 2016 governorship election in Edo State.

**Keywords:** political stability, electoral process, citizens' participation, electoral violence, money inducement

### **Introduction**

Research is a systematic inquiries which seeks to investigate, examine and analyze hypotheses, suggest new interpretations of data or text and expose new questions for future research to explore (Creswell 2003). Therefore, the path and functions of research inquiries in human endeavours cannot be underestimated. It, nevertheless, seeks to ask questions that nobody has asked before, finding answers and transferring and communicating knowledge acquired to a large audience. This has led to tremendous advancement in the scientific and the academic domain and creating new direction or pathway to doing and achieving ideas and things that are being found. The application of the terms or term explanation has been considered a mattered with other phenomena by means of general laws. General laws comprise the framework from which a particular explanation can be derived (Braithwaite 1960). Therefore, the relevance of a research inquiry in assessing the role of citizen participation in electoral process in Nigeria has its own research implications.

The political stability and development of any political system is a function of the awareness and positive involvement of the citizens in civic and political matters. One of the most crucial and yet least developed democratic institutions in Nigeria is the political party system. The performance of political parties in terms of articulation, aggregation, representation and

organization are crucial to political accountability, political communication, political stability and political participation (Ikelegbe, 2013). The central role played by political parties in the development and nurturing of a virile democracy and its consolidation cannot be overstated. It is a mechanism by which the ruling class consolidates its hold on the state power. However, the nature and the function of party systems tend to conform to the interests of the ruling class in the survival of its system of domination (Nnoli, 1999). In the attempts to consolidate its hold on state power, the ruling class and indeed the politicians tend to use political parties and party systems to maintain their grip on political powers at all cost.

This study also focuses on other aspects of Nigeria politics that have effect on political parties and the sustenance of citizens participation, one of such is electoral violence (The observer 2015: 9 &15). Voter apathy, the political apathy in Nigeria is based on the problems of ignorance and deliberate deception by some politicians. The consequence of this is the inability of the masses to have a link between their state of underdevelopment and their non participation in the electoral processes (The Nation 2015:8-10).

The activities of political parties and the sustenance of political participation by the citizenry within Nigeria's democracy form the fundamental aspect of this inquiry. The

focus of this paper shall be the 2016 governorship election in Edo State, with Godwin Nogheghase Obaseki of the All Progressive Congress (APC) and Ize Iyamu Osagie Andrew of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) as the major candidates. The role of political parties and the political participation of the citizenry cannot be discussed without making allusion to financial resources. The role of money in politics is a major concern for any nation that adheres to democratic tenets (Guardian 2016:18-22). This raises concern because wealth creates unequal opportunity for participation.

Those, who seek elective positions, search for a god father to nurture their candidacy. Therefore, political participation at various levels of electoral process becomes a mere illusion (The Compass 2016:22-32) It is the interest of this study to examine the activities of the political parties and their leaders in the 2016 governorship election and evaluate the impact on political participation of the voters of Edo State. In the 2016 governorship election, APC which is the ruling party at the federal level and also the ruling party at the state level and all the political parties, including the ruling and opposition parties employed various resources and activities to mobilize citizens to participate in the election to ensure that they won the election and took over political power in the state.

The content analysis methodological tool of data collection was demonstrated as the the

methodological tool in case of the Governorship election. The major processes involved in conducting a basic social science research were carried out beginning with the statement of the problem.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The fundamental issue for Nigeria's democracy is the problem associated with the activities of political parties and its influences on citizens' participation in the political process. For the ordinary voters in an election, there is and has often been the issue of their opinion not counting since the electoral process is usually fraught with irregularities.

Such problems include the character of the political parties in the 2016 governorship election in Edo State; lack of confidence in the electoral processes; elites overwhelming dominance; electoral violence; voters' apathy and poverty; god fatherism; money inducement; security of lives and properties; and the power of incumbency.

### **Objective of the Study**

The goal of this study is to conduct an assessment of the role of citizens participation in the electoral process in Nigeria with specific focus on the 2016 governorship election in Edo State using the analytical tool of content analysis in data gathering.

### **Basic Assumptions**

The following basic assumptions were formulated to give direction to the data collection effort in the study.

**Assumption I:** The character of political parties in the 2016 governorship election impacted the outcome of the election results.

**Assumption II:** Lack of confidence in the electoral processes by the electorate influence the results of the election.

**Assumption III:** Elites overwhelming dominance in the political terrain further influenced the results of the election.

**Number of referential/population:** 84 (Observer – 24 and the Guardian – 35, Nation – 15, Compass – 10)

### **Literature Review**

Literature review in a research work constitutes an integral part of any research. It shares with the reader the results of other studies that are closely related to the study being reported. It relates a study to the larger ongoing dialogue in the literature about a topic, filling in gaps and extending prior studies (Cooper, 1984; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Literature review on the subject of context analysis has not been a major source of data collection (Jones, 1987:77). The emergence and the application of content analysis have generated series of controversies among social science scholars. This method gained general and greater popularity as well as a method of communication research (Wimmer & Dominick, 1994). It became useful in the explanation of “patterns of speech” of various

political actors and also in the analysis of thematic issues in public addresses and political statement e.t.c. Jones (1987: 78) went further to opine that one can find out a great deal about a society's value system by content analyzing text books. The usage and development of content analysis as a scientific tool can be associated to the growth of newspaper at the turn of the sixteenth century which led to a number of investigations as to their role and content which was extended later to all other mass media when they became evident- radio, movies and television. Interest in political symbols also added features to the analysis of public messages using the content analysis.

The Great Depression of (1930's). New social and political problems as well as the emergence of empirical methods of inquiries in the social science (Omoruyi, 1987:2), Lasswell (1965), did an important work in which he compared trends in the frequencies of national symbols using prestige papers of several countries. Content analysis, assumed a scholarly form when eminent social scientist entered the field likes of Mediarmid (1937), Holsti (1968), Klippendorff (1980) e.t.c., bring with them rich theoretical frameworks that eventually became part of the larger research efforts (Omoruyi, 1987:3).

### **1.5 Conceptual Clarification**

#### **Content analysis**

Content analysis as a methodological tool in the social science is defined according to

Berelson (1952) as a technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication. Whilst, Kerlinger (1986) another renown scholar defines it as that method which is concerned with the studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables. A careful analysis of these definitions centre on areas like system, objective, quantification, context with significant reference drawn from the communication content between the sender and the receiver of the message. Thus, content analysis is all about a method of observation rather than asking response or reply from people to a question. Instead, it takes what they have produced, question been asked and deductions are been answered at, newspapers, letters, radio and television as sources of information or materials.

#### **Electoral Process:**

Electoral process relates to the entire cycle ranging from the provision of voter's education to the dissolution of elections, by elections, and the National Assembly (Elekwa 2008:30). Electoral process involves the following stages or phases:

- i. Delimitation of boundaries.
- ii. Registration of voters.
- iii. Notifications of elections.
- iv. Nomination or selection of candidates.
- v. Elections, announcement of results and completion of tribunal sittings.

Electoral process is often times a complex process that involves the good intentions and undesirable outcome of election administration, particularly in emerging democracies where general elections are often marred by culturally hued electoral malpractices. In Nigeria, electoral process is immensely characterized by a culture of electoral malpractice. Electoral malpractices refer to illegalities committed by 60<sup>th</sup> government and party officials. Reynolds, et al (2005:5) describes electoral process or system as the basic of most basic level. Therefore, an electoral system translates the votes cast in a general election into seat won by parties and candidates.

#### **Citizens' participation**

Hardina (2008) defined citizens' participation as the process whereby those with least resources people on the margins of the society are involved in decision about the services they receive on the part of those that represent them. In practical however the concept of citizens' participation can be classified according to the degrees to which citizens are involved in decision making process, direction of information flow between participant or the status of those who have taken the initiative.

#### **Research methodology and methodological tool**

There are several methodological tools in social science researches. Some of these are; survey method, participant observation, sampling technique, etc among which is

content analysis (Zick 1981). Research can readily use content analysis as a technique for text analysis when statement of the problem, objective of the study and hypothesis or preposition is well defined and stated. Therefore, this research paper employs content analysis to analyse and

explain the role of citizens' participation in electoral process in Nigeria using Edo State 2016 September 28<sup>th</sup> Governorship Election as a reference point. Three basic assumptions were subsequently tested in the process using the content analysis procedure.

**Section A: Style of Data Presentation and classification**

Subject matter	The role of political parties and the sustenance of citizens participation in Edo State 2016 governorship election
Authority	Political parties and Edo State citizens
Standard of the subject matter/level of conflict	Poverty, electoral violence and voters' apathy or alienation.
Location	Edo state, Benin City
Aims of the subject	Political education, security of lives and properties. De-emphasizing monetization in elections. Political parties' re-orientation.
Subject of conflict	Elite's dominance, electoral violence poverty, god fatherism and money inducement.
Time of action	April, May, June, July, August and September, 2016
Direction of subject matters	Positive and favourable
Character of the people	Willingness for change

**Section B**

Form of communication	National newspaper
Form of statement of the problem	Activities of political parties and their influences on citizens participation in the political processes in Edo State
Device	Mass communication

**Table I: Analysis of Variable I according to Assumption I: Character of political parties impacted the outcome of the election results**

News papers	Money inducement by pol. Parties(A)	%	Elites dominance control of parties(B)	%	Citizens' trust in their parties (C)	%	Total Occurrences	Average%
Observer	10	32.3	8	34.8	10	23.3	28	30.1
Nation	8	25.8	4	17.4	6	13.9	18	19.0
Guardian	10	32.3	8	34.8	17	39.5	35	35.5
Compass	3	9.6	3	13.0	10	23.3	16	15.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: The four newspapers analyzed between April and September, 2016**

From table I above, money inducement by political party's stalwarts accounts for 32.3% in the observer, 25.8% in the Nation Newspaper, 32.3% in the Guardian Newspaper whilst in the compass accounting for 9.6%. This is followed by Elites dominance control of parties accounting for 34.8% in the observer Newspaper, 34.8% in the Guardian Newspaper whilst in the compass Newspaper accounting for a total of 13.0%. Whilst citizens trust in their political parties accounting for 23.3% in the observer, 13.9% in the Nation Newspaper, 39.5% in the Guardian Newspaper and 23.3% in the Compass Newspaper.

Citizens Trust in their political parties has 43 occurrences in all the Newspapers accounting for 44.3% of the 97 occurrences of the three (3) variables under the analysis of the character of political parties. Elite's dominance and control of parties had 23 occurrences in all the Newspapers accounting for 23.7% of the 97 occurrences of the variables under the character of the political parties. Whilst, money inducement by political parties has 31 occurrences in all the Newspapers accounting for 31.9% of the 97 occurrences of the variables under the character of political parties imparting the outcome of the election results.

**Table 2: Analysis of variable 2 according to assumption 2  
Theme II: Lack of confidence in the electoral processes influence the result of the election**

News papers	Participation of Electoral Violence by the electorate(A)	%	Security of lives and properties (B)	%	Poverty(C)	%	Total Occurrence	Average %
Observer	12	35.3	5	20	7	28	24	27.8
Nation	8	23.5	5	20	2	8	15	17.2
Guardian	11	32.4	13	52	11	44	35	42.8
Compass	13	8.8	2	8	5	20	20	12.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: The four newspapers analyzed between April and September, 2016**

Table II from the above table, electoral violence by political parties accounts for 35.3% in the observer Newspaper, 23.5% in the Nation Newspaper 32.4% in the Guardian Newspaper and 8.8% in the compass Newspaper, followed by Security of lives & properties accounting for 20.0% in the Observer, 20.0% in the Nation Newspaper, 52.0% in the Guardian Newspaper and 8% in the Compass Newspaper, followed by Poverty accounting for 28% in the Observer, 8% in the Nation, 44% in the Guardian Newspaper and in the Compass Newspaper accounting for 20%.

34 occurrences in all the Newspaper accounting for a total of 40.5% of the 84 occurrences of the three (3) variables under the analysis of the lack of confidence in the Electoral Processes. Security of lives and properties has 25 occurrences in all the Newspapers accounting for a total of 29.8% of the 84 occurrences of the three (3) variables under the analysis of the lack of confidence in the Electoral process, followed by Poverty which has 25 occurrences in all the Newspapers accounting for a total of 29.8% of the 84 occurrences of the three (3) variables under the analysis of the lack of confidence in the Electoral processes influencing the results of the Election.

Electoral violence, by political parties has

**Table III: Analysis of variable 3 according to assumption 3**

**Theme III: Elites overwhelming dominance in the political terrain further influences the result of the election**

News papers	God fatherism (A)	%	Power of incumbency (B)	%	Voter apathy (C)	%	Total occurrences	Average %
Observer	8	29.6	9	22.5	7	28	24	26.7
Nation	7	25.9	10	25.0	2	8	19	19.6
Guardian	8	29.6	14	35.0	13	52	35	38.9
Compass	4	14.8	7	17.5	3	12	14	14.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: The four newspapers analysed between April and September, 2016

From the table above, god-fatherism accounts for 29.6% in the Observer, 25.9% in the Nation Newspaper, 29.6% in the Guardian Newspaper, 29.6% in the

Guardian Newspaper, 14.8% in the Compass Newspaper, followed by power of incumbency accounting for a total of 22.5% in the Observer Newspaper, 25.0% in the



Nation Newspaper, 35.0% in the Guardian and 17.5% in the Compass Newspaper whilst voter apathy accounts for 28% in the Observer Newspaper, 8% in the Nation, 52% in the Guardian Newspaper and 12% in the Compass Newspaper.

Power of incumbency has 40 occurrences in all the Newspapers accounting for a total of 43.5% of the 92 total occurrences of the three (3) variables under the analysis of the Elites overwhelming dominance in the political terrain; followed by godfatherism having a total of 27 occurrences in all the Newspapers, accounting for 29.3% of the 92 total occurrences of the three (3) variables under the analysis above, whilst voter's apathy has 25 occurrences in all the Newspapers, accounting for 27.2% of the 92 occurrences of the three (3) variables under the analysis of Elites overwhelming dominance control in the political terrain influencing the outcome of the Election results.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The first assumption states that the “character of political parties impacted the outcome of the elections”. Under that, three variables notably “money inducement by political parties”,

“elite's dominance/ control of political parties” and “citizens' trust in the political parties” were isolated. The three variables have the frequency of occurrence of the variables as 31 which accounts for 31.9%; 23 which accounts for 23.7% and 43 which accounts

44.3% in that order. Though, there is the element of money inducement by the political parties as reported by the newspapers and there is the impact of party hierarchies influence on the electorate; but the overriding influence as far as assumption one (1) is concerned is citizens' trust in the political parties and the electoral process which eventually culminated in the result of the 2016 Governorship Election in Edo State.

The second assumption states that “lack of confidence in the electoral processes influenced the results of the elections”. Anticipation of electoral violence by the electorate is the first variable; “security of lives and properties” is the second while the third isolated variable is “poverty”. The first occurred 34 times which accounts for 36.2%; the second has 25 frequencies accounting for 26.6%; whilst the third has 25 frequencies accounting for 26.6%. The overriding variable in the second theme is “anticipation of electoral violence”.

For the third assumption, which is “elite overwhelming dominance in the political terrain influenced the result of the election”. The first variable is “godfatherism” with 27 frequencies accounting for 29.3%; “power of incumbency” has 40 frequencies accounting for 43.5% and “voters' apathy” with 20 frequencies accounting for 27.2%. With this assumption, “power of incumbency is most prominent of the three isolated variables.

It is observed that through the three assumptions, three variables notably “citizens' trust of parties”, “anticipation of electoral violence” and “power of incumbency” have highest prominence among other variables. This observation may not be ordinary coincidence. In the Nigerian politics where the contest or struggle for power is almost a “do or die” affair, violence between the supporters of major political parties in the contest is always anticipated. The “power of incumbency” is also a major factor hence its prominence in the data. The incumbency has a number of indices to its advantage: control of the security apparatus, the control of the government media houses, availability of state funds to finance campaign and above all, if the incumbent political party has a good record of performance, it could be a positive index that could earn the party “citizens' trust” which is the variable that has the greatest prominence among the nine (9) variable isolated in the three (3) themes.

With “poverty” so pervasive in our society, it is not unexpected that political parties will want to influence or induce voters with money, people will collect the money and still vote according to the trust they have in the party that, in their opinion, will serve them or perform better than the others.

In summary, the content analysis of the data collected from the four (4) newspapers points to the fact that the overriding index that had

influence on the result of the 2016 Governorship Election in Edo state is citizens' trust in their political parties. This is without prejudice to the other indices with varying degrees of prominence indicated by the frequencies of their occurrences in the data gathered.

### **Conclusion**

Content analysis as a comparative tool of analysis with other methods of social science is unique, as it specifically gathers and draw inferences from information which might be recent or past, according to the rudiment of its contents. The methodology of content analysis has proven very useful in data collection with analysis that will eliminate the problem of bias that is associated with interview or questionnaires where the respondents can modify their responses. The analysis of the data arising from the 2016 Governorship Election in Edo state is a proof of the fact. The data showed the interconnectedness of the various variables that were isolated and how each of them might have influenced the results of the elections. The various degrees of impact of these variables became very clear and those with overriding influence are quite instructive and have didactic imports for political parties and power entrepreneurs that even though other factors may influence the electorate, the parties, when elections are won, must perform to the extent of securing citizens' trust to be able to win future elections.

### **Recommendations**

Following from the conclusion drawn in this study, it is recommended that political parties should strive to build citizens' trust. There is little trust the people will have in a political party that refuses to perform in a tenure of four years only to come out again when elections are around the corner to induce people with money or threaten them with violence as instruments to win elections. Those instruments are fast becoming outdated.

On the power of incumbency, an incumbent will only be powerful to the extent of winning further elections on account of good performance. Political parties should know that an incumbent with poor record of performance will be rejected at the polls. That is the essence of democracy. Parties should be faithful to their promises to the people. Projects and programmes that touch electorates positively should be carried out. Their policies should not alienate the masses from the proceeds of governance.

It is also recommended that provision of adequate security during elections would allay the fears of electoral violence and insecurity that always result in low turn-out of voters at elections. Adequate security would also ensure the credibility of the electoral process.

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