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## *Apathy and the Integrity of the Electoral Process in Nigeria*

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### **Introduction**

Nigeria's democratic experience has been faced with the question of credibility of our electoral process and elections... our elections have been challenged as not being free and fair. This has posed serious legitimacy question for our leaders. .. massive rigging, violence, manipulation of election materials and records, lack of transparency on the part of electoral officials, delay of voting time, deliberate denial of funds for INEC, suspension and expulsion of party members .. among others are perpetual characteristics of Nigeria's electoral process.

Ngove, 2012:1

The stupendous electoral fraud that was recorded .... is bound to produce negative consequences on the electorates. ... it will lead to monumental political apathy. Eligible voters traumatized by the vicious and organized violence that left many people dead and several others injured and/or maimed are bound to recline from participating or voting in subsequent elections.

Okolie, 2005:445

There exists voter's apathy in Nigeria and this is no longer contentious. Voters turnout in the just concluded general elections had provided a scientific and empirical evidence of the existence of voter's apathy and nonchalance to sections of the electorate towards election. The National Assembly elections, presidential elections, gubernatorial elections and those of the state Assembly elections conducted in April (2011) show that voter's turnout hovered around 35 per cent. This ugly scenario has implications for popular participation and governance. Jega, Attahiru, cited by Ewepu in *Leadership Newspaper*, 23-04-2012.

## **THEORETICAL COMPASS**

Studies on voting and the electoral process abound in social science literature (see Jega and Ibeanu (ed) 2007; Jinadu, 2007; Okolie, 2005; Onu and Momoh, 2005; Joseph, 1991, Odoemena, 2003 etc). These studies are largely case studies and focused on specific elections. Moreover, the existing scholarship appears reactionary with little effort made to chart plausible way forward. The present study is an attempt to advance explanations on the possible causes of apathy as a direct consequence of lack of integrity in the electoral processes. Of course, the prevailing **distraught** is a consequence of defective molding of the mind of an average Nigerian. This unfortunate project is systematically being sustained by few psychologically impaired economic gladiators who steal to survive; who loot to institutionalize poverty; and who pursue deliberate policies, using the apparatus of the state, to recycle poverty as a means of keeping the civil society in futile perpetual search for economic emancipation.

We shall therefore anchor our explanation on some basic propositions/axioms derived from the Marxian analysis of the social production of material values. These extracts are contained in several contributions in Marxian political economy.

According to Nikitin (1983:24):

Political economy is, therefore the science of the development of socio-production, ie, economic relations between people. It clarifies the laws governing production, distribution, exchange and consumption of the material wealth in human society at various stages of its development.

Arising from the cardinal propositions and analytical utility of the approach, we adopted the following axioms to guide our study:

- The character of the state and political leadership in a given socio formation is largely a reflection of the level of development of the productive forces; as well as the pattern of production/distribution of material value.
- Production of material values is aimed at addressing the basic needs of man such as food, shelter and clothing, mobility and societal demands for relevance.
- The intensity of societal development is largely orchestrated by the quality and quantity of available manpower, level of refinement of instruments of labour and existing object of labour.
- As a corollary of the above, availability of high level development of the productive forces combine with harmonious social relations of production to institutionalize state system which possesses high level of autonomy and hence has capacity for independent action. Such a state becomes highly autonomous, differentiated and dissociated from internal competitions including electioneering.

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## **CONCEPTUAL EXPLICATIONS**

### **APATHY:**

Basically, apathy is a correlate of impassivity or perfunctoriness. It is a state of indifference, or the suppression of emotions such as **concern, excitement, motivation, and passion.** (wikipedia, the free encyclopedia)

It is therefore generally conceived in these related ways:

- -f interest or concern, especially regarding matters of general importance or

- -sibility or suppression of **passion.**

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It is therefore generally conceived in these related ways:

- Lack of interest or concern, especially regarding matters of general importance or appeal.
- Lack of emotion or feeling; impassiveness, insensibility or suppression of passion, emotion or excitement.

Therefore, an apathetic individual has an absence of interest in or concern about emotional, social, spiritual, philosophical and/or physical life. As aptly stated in the Wikipedia, the free press encyclopedia:

In positive psychology, apathy is described as a result of the individual feeling they do not possess the level of skill required to confront a challenge. It may also be a result of perceiving no challenge at all (e.g. the challenge is irrelevant to them, or conversely, they have learned helplessness).

Political apathy is therefore the indifference on the part of citizen of any country as regards their attitude towards political actions. Similarly, Mason, Nelson and Szlarski (1991:205) stated that:

Political apathy is the lack of psychological involvement in public, emotional detachment from civic obligations, and abstention from political activity. But it is not any one of these things alone, and these may be regarded as necessary, but not sufficient components of political apathy. Political apathy is evidence in mass, collective behaviour but has its origin at the level of the individual psyche. In the aggregate, political apathy is revealed by attitudes and an absence of expected activity. When people cease to care about political life, withdraw from obligations to civil society, and perform entirely minimal or rote acts – or none at all – in political institutions or organisation, apathy is indicated.

This primary concern of the paper is voter's apathy vis-à-vis the electoral process. By voter apathy we refer to a perceived apathy (lack of caring) among voter in an election. Generally speaking apathy is often the result of social system actively obstructing engagement and involvement. It is also a psychological problem for some

- It is largely associated with personal honesty: acting according to one's beliefs and values at all times.
- Commitment and authenticity.
- In fact, integrity does not consist loyalty to one's subjective whims, but of loyalty to rational principles.
- In its general usage, integrity is honesty and trust in discharge of official duties.

Meanwhile, as aptly noted by the Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia:

The word "integrity" stems from the Latin adjective integer (whole, complete). In this context, integrity is the inner sense of "wholeness" deriving from qualities such as honesty and consistency of character. As such, one may judge that other "have integrity" to the extent that they act according to the values, beliefs and principles they claim to hold. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/integrity:I>

We need to emphasize that integrity, as the quality of possessing and steadfastly adhering to high moral principles or professional standards, is the bedrock for transparency and accountable governance and/or public administration. In fact, accountability and transparency without integrity may not end up serving the public interest. Basically integrity requires three steps:

- Discerning what is right and what is wrong;
- Acting on what you have discerned, even at personal cost; and
- Saying openly that you are acting on your understanding of right from wrong (Carter, 1996:7 & 10).

On the basis of the above, Van Minden (2005) cited in the Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, outlined the following as the fundamental traits of low integrity:

- that persons who have "low integrity" report more dishonest behaviour
- that persons who have "low integrity" try to find reasons in order to justify such behaviour
- that persons who have "low integrity" think others more likely to commit crimes — like theft, for example. (Since people seldom sincerely declare to prospective employers their past deviance, the "integrity" testers adopted an indirect approach: letting the work-candidates talk about what they think of the deviance of other people, considered in general, as a written answer demanded by the questions of the "integrity test".)
- that persons who have "low integrity" exhibit impulsive behaviour
- that persons who have "low integrity" tend to think that society should severely punish deviant behaviour (Specifically, "integrity tests" assume that people who have a history of deviance report within such tests that they support harsher measures applied to the deviance exhibited by other people.)

- ◆ vote buying;
- ◆ misinformation;
- ◆ misleading or confusing ballot papers;
- ◆ ballot stuffing;
- ◆ mis-recording of votes;
- ◆ misuse of proxy votes; and
- ◆ destruction or invalidation of ballots.

These threats are real and had characterized the electoral process. The scenario is general occurrence arising out of institutionalized fraud. Indeed electoral fraud is a clear manifestation of the existence and pervasion of low or total lack of integrity among the stakeholders in the political system beginning from the average Nigerian to the political leadership. Scholars such as Ibeanu, 2007; Okolie, 2005; Oyediran, 1981; Jega and Ibeanu, 2007; Onu and Momoh, 2005 etc had adequately captured lack of integrity and associated prevalence of state –propelled electoral fraud as the bane of free and fair elections in Nigeria. Existing scholarship has also located this fundamental breach and erosion on integrity on the low level of development of the productive forces, lack of autonomy of the state system; and entrenchment of distributive mentality which collectively give rise to rapacious and unabashed primitive accumulation.

The scenario has impelled the increasing incidence of apathy in the electoral system. Thus Ibeanu (2007: 50 - 54) remark that:

The electoral process as currently constituted in Nigeria is psychologically alienating for the vast majority of the people who are largely outsiders and are only periodically inserted in the process when they cast votes. At the same time, this alienation is understood by the fact that even when these votes casters have completed the ritual, the outcome bears little semblance to the choices they have made through their ballots...So long as the vast majority of Nigerians remain mere vote casters rather than an electorate, the vote in Nigeria will remain devalued

Therefore, the devaluation of the electoral system is manifested in the following observable electoral sharp practices:

- Compilation of fictitious names on voter register
- Illegal compilation of separate voter list
- Illegal printing of voter cards
- Illegal possession of ballot boxes
- Stuffing of ballot boxes
- Falsification of election results
- Illegal thump-printing of ballot papers
- Underage voting
- Illegal printing of forms used for collation and declaration of election results

Year	Voter Turnout	Total vote	Registration	VAP Turnout	Voting age population	Population	Invalid votes	Compulsory voting
1993		14,039,486		27.79%	50,526,720	105,264,000		No
1979	35.25%	17,098,267	48,499,091	44.83%	38,142,090	77,841,000	2%	No

Source: [http://www.idea.int/vt/country\\_view.cfm?CountryCode=NG](http://www.idea.int/vt/country_view.cfm?CountryCode=NG)

From tables 3-6 below, we can practically see that voter turnout during the Presidential elections in Nigeria within the period, 1979-2011, was comparatively not encouraging; especially when compared with what obtained in Germany, United Kingdom and the United States of America.

**Table 3: Voter Turnout during Presidential Elections in Nigeria**

Year	Voter Turnout(%) Total	Invalid Votes (%)
2011	53.68	3.19
2007	58	-
2003	69.08	6.0
1999	52.26	2.4
1979	35.25	4

Source: Ezeani, 2012:5

**Table 4: Voter Turnout during Presidential Elections in Germany**

Year	Voter Turnout(%) Total	Invalid Votes (%)
2009	70.78	1.44
2005	77.65	1.60
2002	79.08	1.20
1998	82.20	1.60

Source: Ezeani, 2012:6

**Table 5: Voter Turnout during Presidential Elections in United Kingdom**

Year	Voter Turnout(%) Total	Invalid Votes (%)
2010	65.77	1.03
2005	61.36	0.30
2001	59.38	0.40
1997	71.46	0.20

Source: Ezeani, 2012:7

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