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# The Blemish of Voter Apathy in Sustaining Democratic Governance in Nigeria: The Role of Political Parties

Lukman Olalekan Aliyu<sup>1</sup>, Idris Danjuma Mohammed<sup>2</sup>, Matthew Funsho Bello<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Politics and Governance, College of Humanities, Management and Social Sciences, Kwara State University, Malete, Ilorin, Nigeria. Email: lukmanaliyu1@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup> Department of Politics and Governance, College of Humanities, Management and Social Sciences, Kwara State University, Malete, Ilorin, Nigeria. Email: hujjatallah2003@gmail.com

<sup>3</sup> Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences, Gombe State University, Gombe, Nigeria

Correspondence: Matthew Funsho Bello. Email: drmatthewfbello@gmail.com

## Abstract

Sustaining democratic governance is a philosophy hinged largely on the functionality of the institutions of governance in line with democratic process and norms. The study established that virile democratic system is an illusion when a chunk of citizens are less concerned and disinterested in political activities of their country especially when it comes to voting. That is, a carefree attitude by the citizens towards voting is inimical and an aberration to widely celebrated modern democracy. Expectedly, political parties play a crucial role in citizens' participation in politics, because they are mobilization forces. When political parties stimulate violence then it becomes a problem. The core interest of this study therefore is to investigate the interplay between campaign characters of political parties and low voters turn out in Nigeria. Secondary method of data collection was adopted, as published article, books and relevant reports were captured from the national dailies. This study out found that in Nigeria, political parties are liabilities rather than assets to the Nigerian Democracy, considering their attitude that encourage voters' apathy. Indeed, failed electoral promises; ideological bareness; electoral violence, high level of indiscipline and unprincipled party defection characterizes Nigeria's political parties and by implication stimulate among the citizens a mood of pessimism about partisan politics. As the 2019 general elections had been concluded and Nigerians continue to yearn for sustainable democratic governance, political parties should reposition themselves; by being well grounded on ethos and ideology and build confidence and trust in the electorates. Hence, there is a compelling need for Nigerian political parties to be democratic, as democracy is incontrovertibly inconceivable without virile political parties.

**Keywords:** Democratic Governance, Sustainable Development, Voter Apathy, Political Parties, Nigeria

## Introduction

It is an axiomatic expression that popular participation is one of the key elements of democracy. Citizen's active participation in political activities in a wider sense constitutes a building block for the promotion of democracy.

We can hardly have a robust democratic system when the citizens are less concerned and disinterested in discussing issues and events that affect them and their community. It is arguable to say that, political participation takes a central position in the viability and sustainability of democratic project. Put differently, at the centre of every democratic idea is the notion of political participation which describes the extent to which individual members of the society share, take part, or get involved in decisions that affect the life of the citizens/society. Political participation is therefore, a barometer that shows the degree of political interest and concern that establish a line of demarcation between democratic and non-democratic citizenry (Deth & Elff 2000:1). Ultimately, engagement in politics is not to be considered as a specific type of activity rather, it is an integral part of social life and it is essential for the well-being of every individual. It is a statement of fact that the most popular means of citizens' participation in politics today is through voting in an election. Therefore, exhibition of carefree attitude by the citizen to political issues specifically voting exercise constitutes voter apathy. Put simply, voter apathy implies lack of interest of the eligible electorate in electoral processes as well as voting during elections.

Expectedly, political parties' strategic position in a democratic dispensation to serve as a pivot mobilization and recruitment force is to obviate any apathetic menace in democracy. Political parties are major vehicles for enhancing citizen participation in governance. According to Agbaje (1999:198) through internal debate and discussion, as well as campaigning and electoral competition, parties engage in political education and socialization. Thus, subscription to the above orientation is to perceive political parties as an antidote to voter apathy. Moreover, it was argued by Omotola (2010:25) that "political parties basically are expected to sever as (a) formidable democratization force... engendering popular participation and promoting political education and national integration". This simply means that, political parties are basic prerequisites in a democracy as they provide the platform in which people are engaged politically.

The aforementioned important role of political parties has not substantially manifested in citizen participation in political activities. Put differently, the level of political apathy in Nigeria is a big challenge for political parties that appear on the country's political map in terms of political education. Indeed, despite a round of applaud that greeted the 2019 general elections. In fact, Empirical evidence from the INEC shows that 35.66% voter's turnout was recorded in the 2019 election as against (43:65%) electorates that officially voted during the 2015 presidential election. It is of concern that as a significant increase is observed in the number of registered voters while the vote cast keeps decreasing. Regrettably, considering the scanty attention paid by the scholars to political apathy; most specifically voter apathy in the literature, the phenomenon appears innocuous to Nigeria's fledgling democracy. Of course, this orientation has been ill-conceived and erroneously indisputable (it does not augur well for democracy), as parochial political culture, if unaddressed could be counter-productive and lead to what Diamond (2008) in (Ogundiya, 2011: 1) termed 'democratic reversal'.

### Statement of the Problem

That popular participation is a major substance of a healthy democracy is indisputable. Democracy is a game of numbers, in essence the government draws its power and legitimacy from the number of votes cast in a free, fair, credible and acceptable elections. Understanding the forgoing assertion in the contemporary party politics in Nigeria appears hard considering the worrisome level of citizen's participation in voting exercise which is strategic to political participation. In simpler sense, it is unhealthy for any democratic system to have unappreciable level of citizens' participation in its political activities. Since the return to new democratic order in 1999, Nigerians participation in voters' registration exercise as well as voting during the elections has not been encouraging. In spite of government's effort to ensure full participation and involvement of citizens in politics and governance which constitute one of the main thrusts of representative democracy, yet majority of Nigerians still demonstrate lack of interest in political activities.

Apparently, it has been argued that:

*since 1999, the country witnessed its major lowest voter's turn out ...in the... 2015 presidential elections. The country recorded 43.65% compare to the 54% in 2011 or the 57% in 2007 and lastly the 69% and 52% in the 2003 and 1999 elections respectively (Fagunwa 2015:4).*

This simply suggests that, low turn-out of voters in the 2015 general elections is a spill-over of voters' apathy in Nigeria. In fact, out of 181,562,052 million Nigerians, 67,422,005 million registered voters were recorded, while just 29,432,083 million total votes were recorded, representing just 29%. Worst still, the recently concluded 2019 general elections was a mere child's play compared to previous elections conducted by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Indeed, Salahu, (2019) remarked that, ...if the numbers are anything to go by, the 2019 registered voters as presented by INEC is a far cry compared to actual vote cast on election day (*Business Day Newspaper*). As reported by Abang, a voter, Mary Suleiman says that "I came out to vote but the place is empty as you can see and the low turnout shows a major deficit about the electoral process" (cited in [Aljazeera.com/news/Africa/2019](http://Aljazeera.com/news/Africa/2019)).

The record of Independent National Electoral Commission INEC shows that the percentage of voters' turnout in the 2019 general election stood at 35.6%. Paradoxically, there was a significant increase in the total number of registered voters (84,004, 084 million) in this election year while only 28,614,209 were total number of votes cast ([www.inecnigeria.org](http://www.inecnigeria.org)). The above data is democratically poor looking at the centrality of people's participation to the legitimization and good standing of democracy. The foregoing voting revelations are of political concern because it is a pointer to bad governance. It is cancerous to Nigerian systemic governance. Therefore, necessary steps must be taken to address this situation because of its negative implications on the prospect of democracy in Nigeria. Despite, the gravity of this problem in the nation's fledgling democracy, little or no attention is given to this issue in the extant literature. It is an attempt to fill this gap in knowledge that this study becomes necessary.

### Theoretical Framework

As a tool of analysis, this study employs Structural Functionalist Theory in Political Science propounded by Gabriel Almond (1956). Structural functionalism is relevant to this study because it posits that every political system performs certain functions and that every political system has some structures while these structures perform certain functions meant for them. Meanwhile, the functions performed by these structures are quite essential to the effectiveness, efficiency and stability of the political system. By structures, he meant institutions such as political party, legislature; executive, judiciary etc. indeed, (Ray 2009:12) asserts that the basic theoretical proposition of structural functionalism is that in all social systems, certain basic functions must be performed. Almond was primarily concerned with how political system change in time, that is, from the traditional to modern world. He emphasized on the structures and their functions instead of the process that happened in the political system, a political system is composed of several structures that are "pattern(s) of action" (ibid). Put differently, Almond identified seven (7) variable lists of functions to be performed by the political system. These include: political socialization and recruitment; interest articulation; interest aggregation and political communication. These he called **input** and non-governmental functions. While the **output** and governmental functions consists of rulemaking; rule application and rule adjudication. It is essential to note that, political socialization and recruitment as an input function is very germane to this study, because Almond is reported to have argued that political recruitment takes up where general political association function leaves off. According to Nistisha, (2013) political party recruits members of the society out of particular subcultures, religious communities; statuses; classes; ethnic communities and the-likes and inducts them into specialized roles of political system, trains them appropriately in skills, provides them with political cognitive map, values, expectations and effects. This simply implies that political parties play a crucial role in this process, since political recruitment and socialization are input functions. It is therefore becomes essential that the political parties be actually involved in creating a more deserved virile democratic system.

Meanwhile, Almond's proposition was not without shortcomings. Firstly, by the assumption of the theory it is not easy to distinguish between deliberate aims of the participants and what the system intends to achieve. Secondly, the identification of functions is alleged to rest on the interpretation the analyst places on observed developments. Thus, there cannot be complete objectivity. Also, Structural functionalist theory has been seen as culture-bound since the functions attributed to the political system are too closely modeled on Western political

system (Enemuo, 1999:23). Despite all these criticisms, Structural functionalism has been recognized as the major existing tool for genuine comparative analysis of political systems.

## Conceptual Exploration

### Democracy

Considering the fact that, democracy houses political parties, it has enjoyed prominence in modern political debates. As a model, democracy arrests the attention of a chunk of political actors' world over, as a concept it attracts continuous intellectual discussion among the scholars particularly in social sciences. In fact, all other political and socially significant issues like; justice, human rights, rule of law, good governance, poverty and development are discussion(s) within the purview of democracy (Ogundiya, 2011:2). It is inferable from this assertion that democracy is by far the most popular form of government in the world today. Indeed, as every political actor/politician wants to be addressed as a democrat, every regime wants to be described as democratic. Democracy is a system of government under which people exercise their governing power directly or through representatives periodically elected by them (Appadorai, 1968:17). This simply implies that democracy is in operation if it provides institutions for the expression and, direction of people's will. In a similar vein, Schumpeter defined democracy as a system to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the vote (Ogundiya, 2011:3). In this context, democracy is governance that involves the widest participation, either through elections or through the administration of the accepted and adopted policies.

However, in its classical sense, democracy is a Greek word which means "people rule" or "rule by the people". By implication therefore, democracy means the acceptance of the basic quality of means as humans and the basic responsibility of all adult men and women for their own destiny (ibid). In effect democracy means direct and active participation of the citizens in the affairs of the city/ state. Meanwhile, direct democracy has become practically impossible today owing to the complex nature of modern societies. In order to overcome the challenges posed by the size, complexity and multicultural nature of the contemporary society, various models of democracy were developed by political theorists. In a broad sense, we can view democracy from Liberal or representative, to social democracy perspectives. Put differently, democracy is a system of government under which people possesses power to send packing, an unwanted government through majority vote. In addition, the will of the people in democracy is the basis and legitimacy of power, authority which is to advance their interest. In this regards, popular sovereignty is the hallmark of democracy.

For democracy to work well, Dahl (1971) argues that 'eight institutional guarantees are required. These include: freedom to join organization, freedom of expression; right to vote; eligibility for public office; the right of political leaders to compete for support and vote, alternative sources of information, free and fair elections and institutions for making government policies depend on votes and other expression of preference (Timothy, 2010:180); to this can be added the right to adequate representation. It is clear that Dahl's requirement is insufficient as protection for minorities rights hardly get considered. In another development, democracy is also viewed in terms of procedures (such as elections and constitutional provisions and principles. Griddens (2000) submits that democracy exists when you have a multiparty system with political parties competing with one another, free and no-corrupt procedures to elect political leaders and an effective legal framework of civil liberties or human rights that underline machinery of voting processes; at given intervals.

Central to Griddens analysis are, a competitive multiparty system, free and non-corrupt election, an effective legal framework of civil liberties or human rights. Meanwhile, Democracy entails much more than laws and procedures. Instead, it is all about the quality, that is "Substance of political (social and economic) life. This simply suggests that democracy as Till (2000) put it revolves around issues of human welfare, individual and social freedom, security, equality, social equality, public deliberation, peaceful conflict resolution and so on, (cited in Timothy, 2010:181).

The liberal or representative democracy implies a system of rules embracing elected "officials" who undertake to "represent" the interest and views of citizens within the framework of rule of law (Enemuo, 1999:144).

Liberal democracy has emerged as the dominant model of democracy. According to Ogundiya, (2010:5), representative democracy could be celebrated as both accountable and feasible government, potentially stable over great territories and time Spans. This mode of democracy has sought to justify sovereign power of the state, while at the same time, justifying the limits on that power. The ultimate authority of government is vested in the common people so that public policy is made to conform to the will of the people and to serve the interest of the people (Guaba, 2003:421). Democracy is therefore seen as a tool of politically-oriented objectives realization. Hence, central to democracy in this context are: equality, sovereignty of the people, respect for human life, the rules of law, and liberty of individual. To have democracy sustained in developing countries in particular, the role of political parties cannot be downplayed considering its political socialization and recruitment functions. Put differently, any fledgling democracy like we have in Nigeria needs mass participation through effective and viable political parties. This is because democracy is unthinkable without political parties.

### **Democratic Governance**

In a philosophical sense, democratic governance is the perception of sovereign nature of the public in democracy. The exercise of power by the general public via the institutions of the state arose as a sense of governance that is self, procedural, and participatory. In democratic governance, institutions play a vital role in the determination of the affairs of the state. In fact, in this channel of thought, Amit (2012) in the Oxford Handbook of Governance, contends that democratic institutions serve both as the voice of the people and as their agents. According to this perspective, this form of decision-making is commonly described as democratic government: “democratic” because decisions are made by representative institutions that stand for the voice of the people; “government” because the decisions of these institutions are carried by the bureaucracy of the state. In another orientation, democratic governance is anchored on some standards which include: political pluralism, institutional accountability and responsiveness, an active civil society, human rights, rule of law and democratic election (OSCE office for democratic Institutions and Human Rights).

### **Political Parties**

It is obvious that many scholars have written on political parties. Of course political parties are often described as the bedrock of democracy. The argument for the dominance of political parties over and above other democratic institutions largely stems from the fact that parties are absolutely essential for the proper functioning of representative democracy. Indeed, political parties in the theoretical literature have long been recognized as a requisite for any democratic political system (SchattSchneider 1942, Downs 1957, Aldrich 1995, Kuenz& Lambright, 2001, Mannig, 2005, & Ogundiya, 2011:11). This is to submit that in the contemporary world democracy cannot make sense without political parties. Bryce (1921) in (Montero and Richard, 2013) argued that parties are inevitable: no free country has been without them, and no one has shown how representative government could work without them. Stroke (1999, 245) asserts that parties are endemic to democracy, an unavoidable part of democracy (Montero & Gunther, 2013). Having said this, in a bid to conceptualize what political party is, the perception of scholars differs. While the approach of some is ideological, i.e. viewed parties in terms of common held idea, value or issues as a group of like-minded people, others see parties largely in terms of what they do. That is, the roles, functions or even activities in addition to party’s organization, structure amongst others. All these have direct link with what we call “interest in parties” and “principles in parties”. In other words, the offered definitions of a political party by some scholars were narrow in operation because they were only concerned with what a political party is. While definitions of a few scholars were extensive and captured not only what a party is, but also what it is meant to do in the political system.

Political parties can be defined as power oriented organizations aiming at governmental responsibility without accepting share in the burden of running a government (Beyme, 1985:12). However, (Ujo, 2004:97) rightly observed that a political party is an organized group with clear defined policy whose aim is to win or retain political power. In essence, a political party tries to win political power when it is the opposition, but when it is the party in power, it tries to hold-on to power. In addition to the above line of reasoning, a political party was defined as: “a group of person (s) bound in policy and opinion in support of a general political cause, which essentially is the pursuit, capture and retention as long as democratically feasible of government and its offices”

(Agbaje, 1999:195). In his own view, Innocent, (2011:181) succinctly asserts that, a political party is a group, organized to gain control of government in the name of the group by winning election to public office. It is therefore unambiguous from the thought of these scholars (Ujo, Agbaje, & Innocent) that, the commonly held ideas, values or stand is central in their definitions of a political party being an organized group whose aim is 'to gain control of government'.

Also, a political party has been defined as, an organization formed to compete in elections for constitutionally elective positions in the various organs of government, especially the legislative and executive arms, and if it wins it take over and exercise the power of the state (Ayeni-Akeke 2008, 128). In line with Akeke's thought, it implies that political parties are organization formed primarily to pursue electoral objectives, as well as competitive activities while other function (of political parties) being formidable to influence governmental decisions and policies was grossly underestimated. In a related development, the new Encyclopaedia Britannica conceives political party 'as a group of persons organized to acquire and exercise political power through election or revolution'. Indeed, this idea is in consonance with the views of aforementioned scholars that political parties are organizations that are primarily concerned with capturing governmental power and to form a government.

Furthermore, a political party is a more or less organized group of citizens who act together as a political unit, have distinctive aims and opinions on the leading political questions of controversy in the state and who, by acting together as a political unit, seek to obtain control of the government (Appadorai, 1968:537-38). In another development, the views of some scholars on political parties do not only address the "interest" as exemplified above, but far beyond that, the "principles" in party was captured. Edmund Burke offer famous prescriptive definition of political party as: a body of men united for promoting their joint endeavours the national interest upon some particular principles in which they all agreed (Harris 1979:143). In essence, party exists to serve the needs of all men in the nation and not sectional interest.

Moreover, the critical role played by political parties in elite formation and recruitment, political socialization and mobilization has been affirmed and reaffirmed by scholars (Agbaje, 1999; Omotosho, 1997; and Dode, 2010). Political parties, according to these scholars, serve as instruments of political education, policy formulation, interest aggregation and articulation, political socialization and leadership recruitment. To perform these noble functions, political parties through internal debate and discussion, as well as campaigning and electoral competition engage in political education. In addition to this, the issues parties chooses to focus on help to set political agenda, values and attitudes that they articulate which becomes part of the larger political culture.

At this juncture, the functions of parties that are in opposition are germane. To Yaqub, (2002) 'it is the basis of competently performing these roles that a political party can stand a good chance of displacing and, thereby, taking power from a political party currently in power (Dode, 2010:190). In fact, in the course of preparing to capture state power and excises authority in the future, the party must devote its attention to recruiting and training people to occupy political positions in the state. By performing these functions, political parties reduce the incidents of anti-nation building factors like ethnic chauvinism, bigotry and other communal culturally diverse countries like Nigeria (Dode, Ibid). This scholar therefore warned that if such parties do not perform their democratic function, it would not be possible for instance, to recruit a broad section of the people of the country concerned into the party, nor, as a result, would it be capable of mobilizing and developing resources to obtain majority vote in support of their programme.

The above wisdom unequivocally dictates that political parties created democracy. Ogundiya, (2011:12) and Diamond (1997) state that: political parties remain important, if not essential instruments for representing political constituencies and interests aggregating demands and preferences, recruiting and socializing new candidates for office, organizing the electoral competition for power, crafting policy alternative, setting the policy making agenda, forming effective governments and integrating groups and individuals into the democratic process. Meanwhile, to function effectively, political parties must be well organized and adequately structured to meet the need of the society.

Essentially, however, for a political party to function very well and be effective, it must have a strong base and ideology. Put simply, a political party must have the quality and be stable. In the view of Veen, (2007), the quality and stability of a party system is determined by a number of factors including, the make-up of the parties; the strength of their internal cohesion and programmatic profile; the structure and efficiency of the organization; the vitality of their members; the identification of everyone with the party; their democratic structure from bottom to top and from local to state level and their internal and external communication skills. Hence, the stability and viability of democracy are to a large extent a function of the party system.

### **Voter Apathy**

Voter apathy arguably is a popular phenomenon in the electoral world. In fact, hardly would concerned actors in electoral project offer analyses without an allusion to voting behaviour and by extension voter apathy and voter turnout. This came to light because voting is the most visible and popular form of citizen's involvement in politics globally, hence, its decline in most democracies raise more question about the stability of the political system. Voter apathy is a distinct aspect of political behaviour in which eligible voters participate not in voting in an election. Voter apathy is a syndrome in which the electorates are indifferent as regards their attitude towards (voting) the most critical aspect of the electoral process. According to Cloud, (2010) voter apathy occurs when eligible voters do not vote in public elections. Understandably, eligibility of voters as well as elections that concern the generality is underscored by Cloud while considering non-involvement in voting exercise.

In another development, voter apathy connotes the absence of a feeling of personal obligation to participate. Voters apathy as Ogunbiyi, (2015) contends, refers to the insensitivity of the people towards participation in electoral processes. Also, the goal of using elections for the selection of competent individuals for public office otherwise refers to as '*legitimacy effect*' may as well be jettisoned when voter apathy manifest itself in an elections. A government produced with a considerable weak legitimacy (low turnout of voters during an election) is far less democratically judgmental. In a similar vein, when voter apathy manifests itself in an election, to reflect the preferences of a large spectrum of voters termed '*representative effect*' may be prevented. The explicit negative consequence of voter apathy appears contrary to the philosophy of an election to make government better and make people lives better life.

In another development, what inform voter apathy is differently perceived in the extant literature. Prominent perspectives includes: sociological; rational choice and political efficacy factor. It has been argued that socio-economic and psychological status of the voters may largely in form his or her disillusionment about voting in an election. Also, the principle of the cost and benefits that guide human behaviour could be a determinant factor for electorate's abstention from elections. In addition, the impact and affectivity of political system to various individuals do shape and inform insensitivity of eligible voters to voting during the elections.

### **How Political Parties encourage Voter Apathy in Nigeria**

Engagement in politics is not to be considered as a specific type of activity, rather it is an integral part of social life and essential for the well-being of every individual (Deth & Elff 2000). The above statement attests to the substance of political participation in the political system. The role of political parties in this regard cannot be overemphasized. Unfortunately, the roles played by both the politicians and the political parties are basically one of the primary realities that continue to trigger political apathy in Nigeria. Expectedly, elections are meant to enhance economic growth and development, but it sounds disappointed and unjust when elections are not playing these roles. Over the years, the failure of the politicians to keep to their campaign promises has discouraged voters by extension strengthen the spirit of political apathy.

Evidently, however, the then National chairman of People Democratic Party PDP Chief Nwodo, submits that:

*Many Nigerians are skeptical of the credibility of the 2011 elections not only because their votes may not count at the end of the day but because they have lost interest in voting as those they voted for before now disappointed them due to lack*

*of performance and their rapid transformation from acute penury to stupendous wealth, all at the expense of the electorate.* (Ojukwu & Olaifa, 2011: 25).

This reality has informed the irrefutable conclusion by the people that elections do not have any value whatsoever and are of no correlation with neither growth nor development. Also, (Ogunbiyi 2014) reported that:

*for one, those who shun the polls readily inform you that their votes would not count. There is this pre-conceived notion among Nigerians that the outcome of most elections in the country is predetermined while many considered political class undeserving of their votes because of their pre-conceived insincerity to electoral promises* (Daily Independent, 2014).

In essence, the general feelings of apathy has been formed by the people that election out comes do not have either direct or indirect positive effects on their livelihood. Consequently, citizens believed that it is not worthy taking part in a process that is fraught with deception.

Also, most people are indifferent to politics in Nigeria because of the unprincipled and un-ideological nature of the existing political parties. Considering ideology as a means of identification, as an instrument of conflict management, as a prescriptive formula and most importantly as a mobilization force, Nigerian political parties do not have clear cut political ideologies if assessed against the above functions (Omotola, 2009:629). Consequently, the parties have found it extremely difficult to emphasize politics of issues. Rather, their mobilizations of popular forces have been largely driven by ethnicity and religion, as much as the influence of money politics (Omotola, Ibid). In fact, the unguided ethnic and religious driven campaigns by the high profile citizens in the last general elections vindicate the above argument. Disappointedly, the former Vice- President Nnamadi Sambo at Minna PDP campaign rally on 4th February, 2015 said that his party was more Muslim-friendly than the opposition party, All Progressive Congress (APC). Iyatse Geoff captured Sambo's words thus:

*Our chairman, Adamu Mu'azu is a Muslim, the Director General of the campaign Organization Ahmadu Ali, is also a Muslim. I am a Muslim. It is only our presidential candidate that is a Christian. In APC, its National Chairman is a Christian, its presidential campaign Director is a Christian, and the vice presidential candidate is a pastor. Which between the two parties has more Muslims?* (The Punch Newspaper, February 2015).

Also, at the Jigawa campaign rally on 21st of January, 2015 Sambo says: "*Buhari has selected a pastor as his running mate, do you know how many Churches he has? He has 5000 Churches, so based on that don't vote for them.*" ([www.naijaloaded.com.ng/2015/01/26](http://www.naijaloaded.com.ng/2015/01/26)).

In a similar vein, the wife of former president Mrs. Patience Jonathan's unguided statements at various campaign rallies before the elections also attests to the ideological sickness of Nigerian political parties. Jala, (2015) reported that during the 2015 PDP presidential campaign rally in Calabar Mrs. Jonathan said: "*Anybody that tell you change, tell that person, carry your change and get away. Anybody that come and tell you change, stone that person.*" Also, at the rally on March 2nd, 2015 in Lokoja, Patience Jonathan asserts that, Buhari's brain is dead. Her words: "*wetin him (Buhari) dey find again? Him dey drag with him pikin mate. Old man wey no get brain, him brain don die patapata*" (Owete, [www.thisdaylive.com](http://www.thisdaylive.com), 2015).

The above impetuous messages credited to the former vice president and wife of the former president was an outburst and act of whipping up religious sentiments in their desperate move to increase the chances of their party in the general elections. Former Ekiti State Governor Ayo Fayose once expressed that "*Buhari would likely die in office if elected, recall that Murtala Muhammed, Sani Abacha and Umaru Yar'Adua, all former heads of state from the North West like Buhari, had died in office*" (This Day Newspaper January, 2015). Also came from Former Chairman of People's Democratic Party, Colonel Ahmadu Ali (rtd) that: "*The Yorubas are ungrateful kind of people, who do not appreciate what others have done for them*" (Sun Newspaper, March 16, 2013). Moreover, as reported by Wahab, (2014:48) that: former Osun State governor Rauf Aregbesola was reported to have said that All Progressive Congress (APC) supporters should attack security agents with charms and

amulets during the August 9th 2014 governorship election in the state (cited in Anthony and Anyanwu, 2019:137).

Consequently, this act would not only trigger ethno-religious crisis in the country, but in addition encourages political apathy because hardly would people see sense, morality and ideology in politics. By implications citizens perceived threats and discouraged from exercising their lawful constitutional duty of political participation most specifically voting in an elections.

In another development, Ogunbiyi, rightly maintained that:

*The failure of political parties to embrace internal democracy is equally accountable for prevalence of voters' apathy in the country, because the culture of imposing candidates without popular appeal on the people is one that most Nigerians did not approve of and this is reflected in their shunning the ballot* (Daily Independent Newspaper, 2014).

The Nigeria politics is suffering from sound ideology as politicians cross carpet from one political party to the other just for personal ambitions. Humorously, prior to the 2015 general election, prominent members of the People Democratic Party, PDP defected to the All Progressive Congress, APC in order to secure relevance in the political dispensation. It is worth mentioning that former Governor of Rivers State Mr. Rotimi Amechi, Engr, Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso,(former,Kano State's Governor,) former House of Representative Speaker, Alhaji Aminu Waziri Tambuwa, Dr. Bukola Saraki, Kwara State Governor, Alhaji Abdu-Fatah Ahmed to mention but a few all decamped from their previous party (PDP) to the governing party APC. This defection, (Fagunwa 2015:31) maintained, poses danger to the so called democratic survival of the country, by extension accelerating political apathy, even after the defection of some of them back to the APC. To him, the effect of the groundless decamping is that a good number of Nigerian felt cheated, they, felt the whole scenario is about having the same old wine in a new bottle thus the enthusiasms was not there during the electioneering process.

According to Ogundiya (2011:209) the alarming trend of defection of politicians and increasing number of party switchers since 1999 when Nigeria returned to democratic rule remains a source of concern. At every level of governments, defection has become part of the political culture. In Nigeria, ethnicity and religion have the place of ideology. In fact, none of these parties have convincing policies that are to be used as a basis for mobilization among the masses. In fact during the 2015 pre-election, there were several reports of prominent politicians openly lobbying for the vote on the basis of ethnic and religious inclinations.

In another development, Fagunwa (2015:33) posits that the reason for political apathy are not just based on the voters feeling that their vote would not count but also on the basic fact that there is a feeling among Nigerian voters that there is often so little to choose from among the existing political parties. It must be added that the undemocratic nature and lack of internal democracy have always been another pointer to backwardness of Nigerian political parties, this often scares potential voters away from elections. Indeed, the People Democratic Party (PDP) national Publicity Secretary Mr. Olisah Metuh cautioned that, "*Internal democracy must succeed for PDP to grow. I get scared sometimes when I think of the fact that if we don't manage our party very well, some day we might be in opposition*" In Ojukwu & Olifa, 2011:25).

Moreover, political parties in Nigeria have encouraged political apathy through the instrumentality of God-fatherism and political violence. It is irrefutable that citizen's sense of political participation can only be developed in an aura of peace and stability. The state of electoral violence in Nigeria has become a source of worry. In another development, Most Nigerians hold the view that the electoral process in the country is replete with violence. Those with this opinion enthusiastically point to the high number of people that have died through the political process (Daily Independent Newspaper, 2014). Meanwhile, the issue of god-fatherism is one of the causes of political violence in the country. Indeed, former National Chairman of PDP Chief Nwodo submits that: "*the party has been handed over to god fathers who with "reckless abandon" impose candidates with questionable character and no leadership qualities on the citizens*"(Daily Independent, Ibid), god-fatherism clog the system of political representation in Nigeria. It is an act that subverts democratic process as it negates commitment to democratic values among the citizen. Arguably however, over the years, (excluding the

December 10<sup>th</sup> 2014 All Progressive Congress APC Presidential primary that produced Muhammadu Buhari) the primary elections in Nigeria have failed to provide the people with credible leaders, while elections have always been awash with irregularities. During the primary elections across the country, crisis broke out in Ondo, Delta, Rivers, and Abia states (Fagunwa 2015:33).

Additional, too, religious ethics amongst the Muslims for sometimes hitherto have been denying some of its followers from participating in elections because of the believe that the leadership process and indeed the type as well as style of governance is against the ethics of the religion; particularly amongst the Ahlus Sunnah sect of Islamic religion in Nigeria. Additionally inspired by the Belgian declaration of equity in the representation of women in politics as well as governance, the religious/cultural values amongst most Nigerian women has not allowed most of them to participate in governance and or its processes.

### **Legal and Institutional Frameworks for Mobilization and Curbing Political Parties Excesses in Nigeria**

In democratic project, the rules of engagement particularly for the key players (Political parties and electoral body) cannot be downplayed. It was not a different story in Nigeria as various mechanisms are in place to curb the excesses of political parties, unite the country with spill-over effect on democratic consolidation. Institutionally, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is statutorily empowered to register and monitor the activities of political parties so as to ensure their full compliance with the existing laws and by implication perform their essential recruitment and mobilization role in the society. Sequence to this, both the Nigerian 1999 Constitution and the 2010 Electoral Act provided a guide to achieve this political objective.

In fact, in the wisdom of the Section 221 of the 1999 Constitution, “No association other than a political party shall canvass for votes for any candidate at any election or contribute to the fund of any political party or the election express of any candidate at an election”. This simply means that only a political party is allowed by law to recruit and mobilize citizens in respect of canvassing for votes for candidate(s) in elections in Nigeria. Hence, a political party in the Nigerian context is a major platform and a vehicle through which citizens could engage in active political project. To this end, Section 222 states that: No association by whatever name shall function as a political party, unless (Sec. b) the membership of the association is open to every citizen of Nigeria irrespective of his place of origin, circumstance of birth, sex, religion or ethnic grouping.

Essentially, however, in order to ensuring peace and tolerance in performing their role in the society, Section 227 of the 1999 Constitution and Section 95 (5) of the 2010 Electoral Act stated that: No association (A political party or member of a political party shall not) shall retain, organize, train or equip any person or group of person for the purpose of enabling them to be employed for the use or display of physical force or coercion in promoting any political objective or interest or in such manner as to arouse reasonable apprehension that they are organized and trained or equipped for that purpose. This provision was unambiguously in-place to forestall political violence and distortion of public order. Meanwhile, the cases of political violence across the country since the advent of democracy in 1999 are utterly a violation of these provisions, threat to democracy and inimical to the unity of the country.

Equally, the 2010 Electoral Act re-echo the above constitutional provision. For instance, Section 95 (1) clearly stated that: A political campaign or slogan shall not be tainted with abusive language directly or indirectly or likely to injure religion, ethnic, tribal or sectional feelings. While sub-section (2) says: Abusive, intemperate, slanderous or base language or insinuations or innuendoes designed or likely to provoke violent reaction or emotions shall not be employed or used in political campaigns. Also germane was Section 96 (1) that stipulated that: A candidate, person or group of persons shall not directly or indirectly threaten any person with the use of force or violence during any political campaign in order to compel that person or any other person to support or refrain from supporting a political party or candidate.

It can be held without contradiction that the above provision that guides political parties and electoral game in Nigeria was anchored on the need to check the excesses of political parties and foster citizens’ participation in political activities in the country. Put differently, if the cardinal philosophy behind the existence of these laws

was to provide a serene environment for Nigerians participation in their own affairs, therefore, any act whatsoever by a political party or any individuals that goes contrary to these status is utterly fostering citizens mood of pessimism about voting specifically and politics generally, which otherwise refers to as 'political apathy.'

### **Conclusion**

It is not incorrect that, in an ideal sense, political parties are mobilizing agents in the political system. By implication, political parties facilitate mass participation of citizens in politics, because democracy hardly makes sense without vibrant and ideologically inclined parties. Disappointedly however, the attitude of political parties and politicians serve as impetus to the existing political alienation otherwise refers to as apathy in Nigeria. This turned a worry because political parties are important drivers of democratic governance. In a simple sense, the mode of operation of political parties during the electioneering process as well as how they exercise power while in Government are chiefly inimical to the philosophy of mass political participation. It is not an overstatement that the crops of parties in Nigeria today lack well-articulated policies and programmes because they are suffering from poverty of ideology. By implication, the feeling and spirit of non-involvement in political activities is invariably strengthened.

In a similar vein, campaign exercises in Nigeria are marked with intolerance and violence. The implication of this is that, people do not expect anything different from the political class. As such, they develop a feeling of apathy toward pre-electioneering process. In other words, the failure of the ruling elite to build confidence of the generality of the people in the country has continued to create the feelings of indifference in political participation in Nigeria, this was reflected in the 2015 general elections. For instance, in Lagos state, only 1,495,975 people voted out of the 5,827,846 registered voters. (Fagunwa, 2015:12). Sequel to the above understanding, there is compelling need for genuine political awareness which is the first step in the educational preparation and empowerment of the next generation of citizens who will be called upon to vote, pay taxes and lead the nation in the challenging decades ahead.

### **Recommendations**

In furtherance to the findings, the study therefore recommends that political parties should strengthen their structures and fully explore their platform for highly desirable political mobilization. This of no doubt shall stimulate virile and mass participation of the citizens in the affairs of the state. Political parties should be well grounded on ideology and operate in line with democratic ethos. Also, as another general election is some three (3) years from now, and Nigerians continue to yearn for sustainable democratic governance, it becomes imperative for political parties as the first institution to facilitate mass participation of voters rather than rigging a bell capable of fostering voter apathy in the country. In essence, political parties and politicians during the campaign should be moderate, objective and be articulate just to achieve singular but fundamental goal of attracting the attention of the potential voters.

Religious sentiments of the none involvement of women in politics by a section of the two(2) main religions in Nigeria; Christianity and Islam should be enshroud in the country, because, based on this a number of women don't participate in politics away or the other, all through casting their votes or even contesting for elective positions.

In a related development, the cultural sentiments of women as only 'domestic and or household property' who must not be seen or heard nor allowed to participate in politics should also be erased in the contemporary age in Nigeria because, in other environments/countries where women are allowed and given political positions of responsibility, there are known to give their best; for example here is one time Prime Minister of England, Margaret Thatcher.

Lastly, it is quite imperative for political parties and politicians to build confidence and trust in the electorates by fulfilling their electoral promise(s). This is important because you cannot build something on nothing, as good governance attracts mass participation and validate legitimacy.

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