



IMPACT OF POLITICAL APATHY ON THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS AND GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA: A CASE STUDY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTION IN OGUN STATE

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Abstract

This study investigates the multifaceted impact of political apathy on the democratic process and governance in Nigeria, with a focus on local government elections in Ogun State. Through a descriptive research design, data was collected from 230 male and female adults in Ogun State, employing stratified and simple random sampling methods. Statistical analysis, including means and correlation analysis, was utilized to examine factors contributing to political apathy, manifestations of apathy, and its consequences on governance. The findings revealed widespread agreement among respondents regarding factors contributing to political apathy, including corruption, ethnic and religious divisions, and socio-economic disparities. Moreover, low voter turnout, limited civic engagement, and elite capture of political institutions are identified as manifestations of political apathy, undermining democratic principles such as representation and accountability. The consequences of political apathy on governance are profound,

exacerbating socio-economic inequalities and eroding democratic legitimacy and accountability. Recommendations are provided to address these

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challenges, including comprehensive governance reforms, promotion of civic engagement, and initiatives to address socio-economic inequalities. These findings underscore the urgent need for proactive measures to combat political apathy and revitalize democratic governance in Nigeria, emphasizing the importance of transparency, inclusivity, and accountability in political processes.

Introduction

Political apathy, characterized by disinterest, disillusionment, and detachment from political processes, poses a significant threat to the democratic process and governance in Nigeria (Ibrahim, 2018). As a nation with a diverse population and a history marred by political instability, Nigeria's democratic development relies heavily on active citizen engagement and participation (Omotola, 2011). However, the pervasive culture of political apathy among Nigerians has hindered the realization of a vibrant and inclusive democratic system. This essay seeks to explore the multifaceted impact of political apathy on the democratic process and governance in Nigeria. By examining its root causes, manifestations, and consequences, we can better understand the challenges it poses to the consolidation of democracy and effective governance in the country.

The impact of political apathy on the democratic process and governance in Nigeria is profound and multifaceted. Addressing this phenomenon requires concerted efforts from both government institutions and civil society to promote active citizenship, strengthen democratic institutions, and ensure the meaningful participation of all Nigerians in shaping the country's future. Failure to address political apathy risks undermining Nigeria's democratic aspirations and perpetuating governance challenges that hinder its development and progress.

Political apathy in Nigeria presents a formidable obstacle to democratic consolidation and effective governance. Rooted in historical injustices, socio-economic disparities, and widespread corruption, this apathy manifests in low voter turnout, limited civic engagement, and elite capture of political institutions. Its consequences include the erosion of democratic accountability, legitimacy, and exacerbation of socio-economic inequalities. To combat political apathy, Nigeria must prioritize political education, transparency, accountability, and citizen participation. Only through these efforts can Nigeria build a more inclusive and responsive democratic system that reflects the aspirations and interests of all its citizens.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION AND ANALYSIS

Political participation is the involvement of the citizens in the political system. Eakin cited in Adelekan (2010) described political participation as the process through which the individual plays a role in the political life of his society and has the opportunity to take part in deciding what common goals of the society are and the best way of achieving these goals. According to Akamare (2003) political participation is an aspect of political behaviour and it focuses on the way in which individuals take part in politics. It is a voluntary activity and one may participate directly or indirectly. The various ways by which the people can be involved in the political system include selection or election of political leaders, formulation of policies, community activities and other civic engagements. According to Awolowo and Aluko (2010), the essence of political participation in any society, either civilized or primitive, is to seek control of power, acquisition of power and

to influence decision making. Political participation is a means of contributing one's quota to the political system and overall development of the nation. Political participation is one of the fundamental requirements of democratic governance. This is the reason why Adelekan (2010) emphasized that ideally, democracy means individual participation in the decisions that involves one's life. In a democratic system, there is the necessity for the citizenry to be fully involved in the democratic procedures of the choice of rulers and effective communication of the public policies and attitudes. Any claim to democratic regime or state must essentially embrace a high degree of competitive choice, openness, and enjoyment of civic and political liberties and political participation that involves all groups of the society (Arowolo and Aluko, 2010). The extents to which people participate in the political system differ from person to person. Falade (2008) identified six types of political participants. These are:

The inactive: These are the people that take no part in any political activity

Voting specialists: These are the people that get eagerly engaged only in voting. Besides voting, they are not concerned about other political activities.

Parochial participants: These people participate in politics occasionally. They vote or get involved in any other political activity only when it affects their personal interest.

The communalist: These are those who get engaged in voting regularly, they also get involved in community affairs but they are not involved in political campaign activities.

The campaigners: They are actively involved in political campaign but inactive in other community affairs.

Complete activists: They are highly involved in all political activities. They actively participate in voting, political campaign, community activities and make contact with public officials. Some of the factors that determine political participation are: cultural, economic, political, religious and educational backgrounds of individuals. Also, the level of political awareness as well as the measure of confidence in the political process determines the extent to which the citizens participate in the political system. In Nigeria, politics is influenced by money, ethnic and religious factors. Since independence in 1960, religious and ethnic politics characterize electioneering process in Nigeria. This is the reason why Albert Legogie, former deputy Senate President, pointed out that it was clear from the trend of the election that there was a big gulf, a dichotomy between the north and the south and between Christians and Muslims (Adeyemo, 2011).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, a quantitative research approach has been adopted. Quantitative research, as defined by Bacon-Shone (2015), involves the structured collection of data using tools like questionnaires, surveys, or polls. The subsequent analysis is carried out based on a sample that represents the larger population.

In this particular study, the researcher opted for a survey design to gather the necessary data for their investigation. This design involved employing a questionnaire or interviews to collect information from participants, enabling the researcher to acquire quantitative data for analysis and drawing conclusions.

By using surveys, researchers can systematically gather information from a wide range of individuals, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter under investigation. In the context of this study, the research population includes both men and women residing Ogun State. Given the vast number of unknown populations, the

researcher chooses to select a random sample comprising 600 individuals. To ascertain the suitable sample size of 240 for the study, the researcher utilizes the Taro Yamane formula at a 95% confidence level. Taking this into consideration, the researcher intentionally distributed 240 questionnaires among the population included in the study. The research instrument was a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was structured on a five-point Lickert Scale and was segmented into six sub-sections. A descriptive approach was employed to gather data, utilizing the survey research method, which was considered suitable for investigating topics related to the research subject, as emphasized by Ogbuoghi (2006). For data collection, a questionnaire was employed as the primary instrument. The data collected was subjected to analysis through the application of descriptive statistics. To assess the personal details of the survey participants, percentages were used, while statistical means were applied to tackle the research queries and offer solutions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Structural-functionalism approach

The synthesis of structural-functionalism, as developed by Gabriel Almond and James S. Coleman in their seminal work "Introduction to the Politics of Developing Area" (1960) and further expanded upon by Almond and G.B Powell in "Comparative Politics: A Development Approach" (1966), forms the cornerstone of this study. At its core, structural-functionalism posits that regardless of their specific characteristics, all political systems must undertake a defined set of tasks to maintain their functionality and equilibrium. These tasks encompass various facets of governance, including rule-making, rule application, interest articulation, interest aggregation, political communication, political socialization, and political recruitment.

Central to the structural-functional approach is the notion that the structures within a political system—referring to the institutional arrangements responsible for carrying out these functions—play a crucial role in determining how effectively these functions are performed. This perspective underscores the importance of examining not only the functions themselves but also the mechanisms through which they are executed within a given political context.

Indeed, the close association between functionalism and political development underscores the theory's relevance in understanding the evolution of political systems. The concept suggests that for countries to progress, they must develop the capacity to fulfill these essential functions effectively. In this sense, the ability of a political system to perform these tasks becomes a key indicator of its developmental trajectory.

Applying this theoretical framework to the present research, it becomes evident that the government's function in fostering democracy serves as a crucial framework for political participation. By ensuring mechanisms for rule-making, rule application, interest articulation, and other essential functions, governments lay the groundwork for citizens' engagement in the political process. This involvement is fundamental to the democratic ethos, as it allows for the expression of diverse interests, opinions, and preferences within the political sphere.

However, it is essential to recognize that the relationship between government functions and democracy is not always straightforward. In some cases, governments may prioritize stability and control over democratic principles, leading to restrictions on political

participation and dissent. Such actions can undermine the very foundations of democracy, highlighting the delicate balance between governance and democratic ideals.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of government functions in promoting democracy can be influenced by various factors, including institutional design, political culture, and socio-economic conditions. For instance, countries with strong institutional frameworks and a vibrant civil society are more likely to uphold democratic principles and ensure meaningful political participation.

The synthesis of structural-functionalism offers valuable insights into the relationship between government functions and democracy. By elucidating the essential tasks that political systems must undertake to maintain their functionality, this framework provides a lens through which to analyze the mechanisms of political participation and governance. In applying this theory to our research, we recognize the critical role of government functions in shaping the democratic landscape and fostering citizen engagement. Moreover, we acknowledge the challenges and complexities inherent in this relationship, emphasizing the need for continual adaptation and reform to uphold democratic ideals in an ever-changing world.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study revealed that corruption and governance challenges have eroded trust in political institutions and leadership. This indicates a pervasive perception of politicians as self-serving and corrupt, which leads to disillusionment and apathy towards the political process. The research also found that Nigeria's diverse ethnic and religious landscape fuels political divisions and tensions. Politicians exploiting these divisions exacerbate mistrust and apathy among different groups, contributing to political apathy. The data collected also highlighted a significant impact of poverty, unemployment, and economic inequality on political apathy. Many citizens prioritize meeting basic needs over engaging in politics, viewing it as irrelevant to their daily struggles.

Low voter turnout diminishes the legitimacy of electoral outcomes and weakens the democratic process: This statement highlights a fundamental aspect of democracy – the participation of citizens in the electoral process. When voter turnout is low, it undermines the democratic principle of representation. Elected officials may not truly reflect the will of the people, leading to a legitimacy crisis. Decision-makers may feel less accountable to the electorate, further eroding trust in democratic institutions.

Political apathy can enable elite capture of political institutions, where a small, privileged minority wields disproportionate influence over decision-making processes: This statement highlights the danger of concentrated power in the hands of a few. When large segments of the population are apathetic towards politics, it creates an opening for elites to exert undue influence over political institutions. This can result in policies that primarily serve the interests of the elite, exacerbating inequalities and undermining the democratic principle of equality.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The factors underpinning political apathy are manifold, encompassing pervasive corruption and governance hurdles, ethnic and religious divisions, and socio-economic disparities. These findings underscore the widespread disillusionment and mistrust towards political institutions and leadership among Nigerian citizens. The data

unequivocally demonstrates the adverse effects of apathy on democratic principles such as representation, participation, and accountability. Initiatives aimed at bolstering voter turnout, promoting civic engagement, and curtailing elite influence emerge as imperative for reinvigorating democratic governance in Nigeria.

The ramifications of political apathy on governance are profound, spanning from the perpetuation of socio-economic inequalities to the erosion of democratic accountability and legitimacy.

The insights gleaned from this study underscore the imperative for concerted efforts from government, civil society, and citizens to combat political apathy and revitalize democratic governance in Nigeria. Initiatives aimed at combating corruption, bridging ethnic and religious divides, addressing socio-economic inequalities, and fostering civic engagement are indispensable for nurturing a more inclusive and participatory political landscape. By tackling the root causes of political apathy and fortifying democratic institutions, Nigeria can progress towards a more dynamic and responsive democracy that genuinely serves the interests of all its citizens. By prioritizing these recommendations, policymakers, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders can work towards addressing the underlying causes of political apathy in Nigeria and fostering a more vibrant and inclusive democracy.

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