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VOTER'S EDUCATION AND READINESS TO VOTE IN 2019 GENERAL ELECTION IN NIGERIA: EMPIRICAL SURVEY

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ABSTRACT
This study examined voter's education and readiness to vote in 2019 general election by the people of South-Eastern Nigeria. Five research questions and four null hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted descriptive survey design. The population of the study covered all eligible voters in the South Eastern Nigeria. Simple random sampling technique was used to draw a sample size of 1000 eligible voters from the five states of the South East. Two hundred (200) eligible voters were selected from each of the five states. Questionnaire was the instrument for data collection. The data collected were analysed using Mean and Standard Deviation. Research questions one to three were analysed using real limit numbers, while research questions four and five were analysed using a Bench Mark of 2.50. Analysis of variance was used in testing the hypotheses at 0.5 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that the respondents' level of awareness about closing date for INEC registration and knowledge of operating hours are low; majority of the respondents lack information about the process of being accredited; do not know that receiving of money or gift for votes, possession of more than one voter's card, giving false information in application for registration, conveying any person to a registration office or to a polling unit by government vehicle or boat, and interfering with a voter casting his vote, are all electoral offences in Nigeria. Majority of the respondents have in possession their voter's card, but are not willing to go for accreditation nor to cast their vote in the next general election. Some factors affecting turnout rate of voters include: belief that election will be rigged, belief that there will be insecurity during general election, lack confidence in INEC. Based on the findings of the study, the researcher recommended among others that more information should be provided to the eligible voters in the South-Eastern Nigeria on the need for full participation in voting exercise in next general election; INEC should convince Nigerian electorates that people's vote will count in 2019 general election; the Nigerian police should as a matter of urgency should assure Nigerians that they will be protected during February 2019 general election.

Keywords: Voter Education, Readiness to vote, 2019 General election, South-Eastern Nigeria, Empirical Survey.

Introduction

The past few years has seen Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and other relevant agencies in Nigeria such as Non-Governmental Organizations (Constitutional Rights Projects (CRP), Campaign for Democracy (CD), Civil Liberties Organizations (CLO), Women in Nigeria (WIN), National Council of Women's Societies, etc) working towards improving voter education in the country. This is not unconnected with poor participation in voting, and increasing invalid votes recorded in recent elections in Nigeria. In the 2015 presidential election, there were 67,422,005 registered voters, out of this figure, only 31,746,490 (47.08%) were accredited for the presidential election; while 29,432,083 of votes were cast, of which 28,587,564 (97%) were valid (Araba & Braimah, 2015). According to report provided by the Centre for Public Policy Alternatives (CPPA), (2015), out of the thirty-six states in Nigeria that participated in the presidential election in 2015, only thirteen states have voter turnout rate of 50 percent and above, while as large as twenty-three states have less than 50 percent turnout rate. It was surprising that all the states in the North-East Nigeria where there have been insurgency had at least 40 percent turnout rate in that election, while some of the states in the South-East Nigeria had less than 40 percent turnout rate as evident in percentage below: Abia State had 33 percent turnout rate, Anambra 39 percent, Ebonyi 40 percent, Enugu 45 percent and Imo State 46%. This poor turnout rate in the 2015 general election has led to more emphasis on improving voter education in Nigeria, especially in places were there have been low turnout of voters such as in the South-East Nigeria.

The idea of voter education is to provide information to voters on who is eligible to vote; right and responsibility to vote, where and how to register; how to check electors voter lists to ensure that one has been duly included; where, when and how to vote; who the candidates are; and how to file complaints. The term voter education is generally used to describe the dissemination of information, materials and programmes designed to inform voters about the specifics and mechanics of the voting process for a particular election (Orman, 2010). Mulyata (2011) defined voters education as the education given to the electorates to enable them participates meaningfully in the elections by voting. Voter education can also be described as a process of facilitating the development of knowledge, capabilities, competencies or skills, values and behaviours of individuals so that they become personally fulfilled and constructive members of the society. In voter education, the electorates are sensitized about electoral offences such as underage voting, multiple voting, selling and buying of voter's card, vote buying or receiving of money or gift for votes, unlawful possession of weapon at voting centre, impersonating registration official, forging a result form, being in possession of more than one voter's card, among others. Ibeanu, Okechukwu, Orji, and Nkwchukwu (2014) reported that the key outcomes that INEC aims to achieve through voter education include among others, increased voter turnout during elections, improved voter knowledge of new accreditation procedures based on the permanent voters' card, reduction in the number of invalid votes at elections, as well as encourage ethical voting. Part of the fundamental questions that voter education exposes the electorates to is, why do we have elections? Why is our vote important? What is the purpose of actually voting? What do we expect from the candidate we are voting for? All these questions are crucial for democratic consolidation and stability. It is obvious from the above that voter education is essential for bringing about the dividend of democracy in every society, including for the people of South-Eastern Nigeria who are the focus of this study. Unfortunately, the extent to which eligible voters from the South-Eastern Nigeria have received voter education and are ready to participate in the 2019 (presidential) election is unclear.

Readiness to vote is concerned with willingness and preparedness to exercise one's franchise by casting a vote for ones preferred candidate during election. In this context, it is concerned about motivation, willingness and preparedness of people of South-Eastern Nigeria to participate in voting by casting their votes for their preferred presidential candidate.

There are many factors that could affect turnout rate in voting. Some of these factors include: belief that election will be rigged by the ruling party therefore that votes will not count, insecurity, lack of confidence in political leaders, lack of confidence in INEC, ethnicity (especially not comfortable with the zone not having a presidential candidates in the two major political parties), religion (not comfortable with

none of the presidential candidates in the two major political parties being a Christian), party affiliation and rigorous voting procedure which requires the voters to first go through the process of accreditation, and then return again to vote. More so, one cannot rule out the influence of Indigenous People of Biafra (Ipob) in voter turnout in the last elections. Since last election in 2015, Ipob has consistently urged eligible voters from South East to boycott elections conducted in Nigeria. The effect of the group order may have reflected in the run out of 2017 Anambra State Gubernatorial election where after the groups directive for the Biafrans to boycott the election, less than a quarter of the total number of registered voters actually participated in the election (Owosoye, 2017). This was confirmed by the report given to the returning officer of the election, Zana Akpagu, that a total of 2,064,134 residents registered as eligible voters for the election with the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC; of this number, only 457, 511, about 22.16 per cent, actually came out on the election day to be accredited. Regardless, not all the 457,511 accredited people actually cast their vote. The INEC figure showed that only 21.74 percent of the registered voters (448,771) actually cast their votes in that election. The above shows that many factors may have affected the desire to vote in election by eligible voters in South-Eastern Nigeria in the past.

Unfortunately, low turnout in voting is associated with obvious negative effects such as wrong choice of leaders, marginalization, and sometimes, agitation by those who feel that the government in power is not doing what it is supposed to do. Despite these obvious effects, it is surprising that those who agitate for marginalization for one unclear reason or the other fail to participate in voting exercise during election. Thus, one would expect that the people of South-Eastern Nigeria will take a lead part come 2019 general election. Already, there is evidence of voter education and sensitization especially by non-governmental organizations to encourage the people of the South East Nigeria to participate fully in the 2019 generally election. However, the extent to which they have been sensitized about the need to participate in general election, and are now ready to vote in February 2019 is not certain. Hence, this study seeks to determine voter's education and readiness to vote in the 2019 general election by the people of South Eastern Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to determine voter's education and readiness to vote in 2019 general election in Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to find out:

1. level of sensitization of the people of South-East about INEC registration in the Zone
2. information received about use of card reader in election
3. information received about electoral offences in election
4. readiness to vote in the 2019 election by eligible voters in the zone.
5. factors affecting readiness to vote in election among eligible voters in the zone.

Research Questions

The following research questions are raised to guide the study:

1. to what extent are eligible voters in South-East Nigeria aware of INEC registration in the Zone?
2. what is the level of information received by the people of South-East Nigeria about use of card reader in election?
3. to what extent are people of South East Aware of electoral offences in election?
4. what is the opinion of people of South East about their readiness to vote in the 2019 general election?
5. what are the factors affecting readiness to vote in election among eligible voters in the zone?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses are posed to guide the study:

HO_1 There is no significant difference in the awareness level of eligible voters from Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States about INEC registration in the Zone.

HO_2 There is no significant difference in the level of information received by eligible voters from Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States about the use of card reader in election.

HO_3 There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of eligible voters from Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States about their awareness of electoral offences in election.

HO_4 There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of eligible voters on their readiness to vote in 2019 presidential election.

Methodology

The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The area of the study is South-East Nigeria, one of the six geopolitical zones in the country, comprising of five states, Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. The population of the study covers all eligible voters in the South Eastern Nigeria. Simple random sampling technique was used to draw a sample size of 1000 eligible voters from the five states of the South East. Two hundred (200) eligible voters were selected from each of the five states. Questionnaire was the instrument for data collection. The instrument was administered directly to the respondents by the researcher with the help of five research assistants. The data collected was analyzed using Mean and Standard Deviation. Research questions one to three were analyzed using real limit numbers as follows: 0.49 -1.49 = Very Low extent, 1.50 -2.49 = Low extent, 2.50-3.49 = High extent and 3.50-4.00 = Very High extent. criterion mean of 2.50. Research questions four and five were analyzed with a Bench Mark of 2.50. Any item with a mean value of 2.50 and above was accepted, while any item with Mean Score below 2.50 was rejected. Analysis of variance was used in testing the hypotheses at 0.5 level of significance. To take decision on the hypotheses tested, the null hypothesis of no significance difference was accepted for any item that its value is greater than 0.05 but rejected where the critical value was less than 0.05.

RESULTS

Research Question 1

To what extent are eligible voters in South-East Nigeria aware of INEC registration in the Zone?

Table 1: Mean ratings and stand deviation of the respondents on Level of sensitization received by the people of South-East about INEC registration in the Zone

n=1000

SN	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Awareness of ongoing INEC continuous voter registration	2.82	0.73	HE
2	Awareness of closing date for INEC registration	1.55	0.61	LE
3	Awareness of registration centres/venues in my zone	2.70	0.69	HE
4	Knowledge of days of registration	2.51	0.68	HE
5	Knowledge of exact hours of starting and closing registration.	1.54	0.62	LE

Note: LE=Low Extent; HE= High Extent

Data in table one revealed that items 1, 3 and 4 have mean rating scores of 2.82, 2.70 and 2.51 respectfully; indicating that awareness level of the eligible voters about ongoing INEC continuous voter registration, registration centres/venues and days of registration are high. In contrary, the mean rating scores of the respondents on item 2 and 5 are 1.55 and 1.54 respectively, indicating that the awareness level of the eligible voters about closing date for INEC registration and knowledge of exact hours of starting and closing registration are low since they are within the real limit number of 1.50 -2.49.

Research Question 2

What is the level of information received by the people of South-East Nigeria about use of card reader in election?

Table 2: Mean ratings and stand deviation of the respondents on Information received about use of card reader in election

n=1000

SN	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Process of being accredited.	1.82	0.73	Low extent
2	Use of card reader in casting vote	2.83	0.66	High extent

Data in table two revealed that items 1 has a mean rating scores of 1.82 indicating low extent, while item 2 has a mean rating score of 2.83 indicating high extent. This means that while the eligible voters are aware of use of card reader in casting vote during election, they lack information about the process of being accredited.

Research Question 3

To what extent are people of South East aware of electoral offences in election?

Table 3: Mean ratings and stand deviation of the respondents on information received about electoral offences in election n=1000

SN	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Underage voting	3.12	0.73	HE
2	Multiple voting	2.92	0.66	HE
3	Selling and buying of voter's card	2.89	0.81	HE
4	Receiving of money or gift for votes	2.20	0.88	LE
5	Unlawful possession of weapon at voting centre	3.40	0.64	HE
6	Impersonating registration officials	2.80	0.56	HE
7	Forging a result form	2.58	0.67	HE
8	Possession of more than one voter's card	2.21	0.74	LE
9	Giving false information in application for	2.11	0.64	LE
10	registration	2.88	0.77	HE
11	Unlawful possession of a ballot paper	3.01	0.65	HE
12	Illegal printing of ballot papers	2.30	0.66	LE
13	Conveying any person to a registration office or to a polling unit by government vehicle or boat, Interfering with a voter casting his vote	2.11	0.68	LE

Data in table three revealed that items 1,2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 10 and 11 have mean rating scores between 2.58 to 3.40, indicating high level of knowledge. As against this findings, items 4, 8,9, 12 and 13 have mean scores ranged between 2.11 and 2.30 indicating, low extent. It implies that eligible voters in South East are not aware that receiving of money or gift for votes, possession of more than one voter's card, giving false information in application for registration, conveying any person to a registration office or to a polling unit by government vehicle or boat, and interfering with a voter casting his vote, are all electoral offences in Nigeria.

Research Question 4

Readiness to vote in the 2019 general election?

Table 1: Mean ratings and stand deviation of the respondents on readiness to vote in the 2019 election by eligible voters in the zone. n=1000

SN	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Possession of voters' card	3.59	0.66	Agree
2	desire to be accredited	2.44	0.81	Disagree
3	Willingness to cast vote	2.39	0.88	Disagree

The table four above shows that item 1 has mean score of 3.59 indicating agreed, while item 2 and 3 have mean scores of 2.44 and 2.39 respectively, indicating disagreed. It implies that while majority of eligible voters in the zone agreed that they have in possession their voter's card, majority of them disagreed that they have desire to be accredited, and neither are they willing to cast their vote in the next general election.

Research Question 5

what are the factors affecting readiness to vote in election among eligible voters in the zone?

Table 5: Mean ratings and stand deviation of the respondents on factors affecting readiness to vote in election among eligible voters in the zone. n=1000

SN	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Belief that election will be rigged	3.12	0.73	Agree
2	Belief that there will be insecurity in the election day	2.83	0.66	Agree
3	Lack of confidence in INEC	2.70	0.81	Agree
4	No presidential candidate of my choice	1.80	0.88	Disagree
5	Because both APC & PDP do not have a Christian as a presidential candidate	1.20	0.77	Disagree
6	Voting process will take my time	1.67	0.62	Disagree
7	IPOB directives	2.18	0.69	Disagree

Table five above showed that items 1,2 and 3 has their mean score ranged between 2.70 to 3.70 indicating agreed, while item 4, 5 and 6 have mean scores of 1.80, 1.20 and 1.67 respectively, indicating disagreed. It implies that some eligible voters in the zone are of the opinion that they will not vote because of the following reasons: belief that election will be rigged, insecurity during general election, and lack of confidence in INEC.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One:

There is no significant difference in the awareness level of eligible voters from Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States about INEC registration in the Zone.

Table 6: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of the Mean Ratings of Respondents on awareness level of eligible voters from Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States about INEC registration in the Zone.

Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F-ratio	Sig. (2-tailed)	Remark
Between groups	.607	4	.303			
Within groups	192.329	211	.689	.140	.144	NS
Total	**192.936**	**281**				

The one- way ANOVA presented the result of F-ratio not to be significant at 0.05 level of significant. F (4,211) = .140; P> 0.05. The F-ratio with a p-value as 0.144 calculated at 0.05 level of significance and at 211 degree of freedom is greater than 0.05. The null hypothesis which posits that there is no significant difference in the awareness level of eligible voters from Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States about INEC registration in the Zone is upheld.

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant difference in the level of information received by eligible voters from Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States about the use of card reader in election.

Table 7: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of the Mean Ratings of Respondents on awareness level of eligible voters from Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States about INEC registration in the Zone.

Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F-ratio	Sig. (2-tailed)	Remark
Between groups	.317	4	.403			
Within groups	177.126	108	.889	.160	.122	NS
Total	**177.443**	**112**				

The one- way ANOVA presented the result of F-ratio not to be significant at 0.05 level of significant. F (4,112) = .140; P> 0.05. The F-ratio with a p-value as 0.122 calculated at 0.05 level of significance and at 108 degree of freedom is greater than 0.05. The null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the level of information received by eligible voters from Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States about the use of card reader in election is upheld.

Hypothesis Three

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of eligible voters from Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States about their awareness of electoral offences in election.

Table 8: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of the Mean Ratings of Respondents on awareness level of eligible voters from Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States about INEC registration in the Zone.

Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F-ratio	Sig. (2-tailed)	Remark
Between groups	.511	4	.303			
Within groups	144.201	95	.689	.113	.105	NS
Total	**144.712**	**99**				

The one- way ANOVA presented the result of F-ratio not to be significant at 0.05 level of significant. F (4,95) = .140; P> 0.05. The F-ratio with a p-value as 0.105 calculated at 0.05 level of significance and at 99 degree of freedom is greater than 0.05. The null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of eligible voters from Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States about their awareness of electoral offences in election is upheld.

Hypothesis Four:

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of eligible voters on their readiness to vote in 2019 presidential election.

Table 9: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of the Mean Ratings of Respondents on awareness level of eligible voters from Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States about INEC registration in the Zone.

Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F-ratio	Sig. (2-tailed)	Remark
Between groups	.317	4	.403			
Within groups	177.126	108	.889	.160	.122	NS
Total	**177.443**	**112**				

The one- way ANOVA presented the result of F-ratio not to be significant at 0.05 level of significant. F (4,112) = .140; P> 0.05. The F-ratio with a p-value as 0.122 calculated at 0.05 level of

significance and at 108 degree of freedom is greater than 0.05. The null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of eligible voters on their readiness to vote in 2019 presidential election is upheld.

Summary of the Findings

Based on the analysis of data, the major findings of the study are;

1. The respondents' level of awareness about closing date for INEC registration and knowledge of operating hours are low.
2. Majority of the respondents lack information about the process of being accredited.
3. Majority of the respondents are not aware that receiving of money or gift for votes, possession of more than one voter's card, giving false information in application for registration, conveying any person to a registration office or to a polling unit by government vehicle or boat, and interfering with a voter casting his vote, are all electoral offences in Nigeria.
4. Majority of the respondents have in possession their voter's card, but are not willing to be accredited, nor to cast their vote in the next general election.
5. Some factors affecting turnout rate of voters include: belief that election will be rigged, belief that there will be insecurity during general election, lack confidence in INEC.

Conclusion

This study has determined voter's education and readiness to vote in 2019 election among adults in South-Eastern Nigeria. Five research questions and four hypotheses guided the study. The design of the study is descriptive. The findings of the study revealed that the respondents have low level of awareness about closing date for INEC registration and knowledge of operating hours are low. The respondents lacked information about the process of being accredited. Some of the eligible voters consulted noted that they are not aware that receiving of money or gift for votes, possession of more than one voter's card, giving false information in application for registration, conveying any person to a registration office or to a polling unit by government vehicle or boat, and interfering with a voter casting his vote, are all electoral offences in Nigeria. some of the respondents argued that though they are in possession of their voter's card, they will not go for accreditation and voting during the general election. On attempting to know why some of the eligible voters will not like to vote during the election, the following responses were obtained: belief that election will be rigged; belief that there will be insecurity during general election, the respondents' lack of confidence in INEC.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers make the following recommendations:

1. Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and other relevant agencies such as Non-Governmental Organization in position of sustaining voter education should prioritize disseminating more information to the electorates about accreditation process during the general election. .

2. Agencies responsible for voter education should provide adequate information to the eligible voters in the South-East Nigeria on electoral offences, especially receiving of money or gift for votes, possession of more than one voter's card, giving false information in application for registration.

3. More information should be provided to the eligible voters in the South-Eastern Nigeria on the need for their full participation in voting exercise in next general election.

4.People of South-Eastern Nigeria should be informed by their elites that they hold their destiny in their hands by exercising their franchise during general election in 2019.

5.Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should be ready to convince Nigerian electorates that people's vote will surely count in 2019 general election. The body should desist from conducting themselves in a way that they will not be portrayed as being partisan.

The incumbent government and their party officials should be transparent in the way they interfere in INEC regulations in order not to be seen as influencing INEC's electoral exercise.

Nigerian Police should as a matter of urgency assure Nigerians that there will protected during February 2019 general election. Educated persons in South-East should assist in sensitizing the youths on the need to participate in election, while keeping aside the idea of referendum until need be.

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