

## VOTERS APATHY AND NATIONAL IDENTITY: A PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPLORATION

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### **Abstract**

*Nigeria is a heterogeneous nation comprising of several ethnic groups that speak different dialects. These citizens have deep religious and ethnic affiliations with their own and during elections vote accordingly. Recent political happenings in the electoral process have shown that people have lost interest in voting because their choices have been subverted and this has caused a steady decline in the number of voters who turn out on election day. Voter apathy occurs when voters decide that they really don't care who wins or loses, and this translates into very low voter turnout (the number of eligible voters who turn out to vote in an election vs the total number of eligible voters). Voter apathy can be caused by a lack of interest in the candidates that are running in an election, a general feeling that a person's vote doesn't matter or even distrust in regards to how the election is actually being run. This paper notes the influence of religion, ethnicity and cultural orientation in the manner people vote and how psychological principles such as affective and cognitive restructuring will help to reduce voter apathy in Nigeria*

**Keywords:** *Affective restructuring, cognitive restructuring, nation building, national identity, voter apathy*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Elections provide the medium by which the different interest groups within the nation state can take and resolve their claims to power through peaceful means (Iyayi, 2006). Electoral participation is one of the three main indicators of democratic performance (Powell, 1982). According to Dalton (1988), citizen involvement in the political process is essential for democracy to be viable and meaningful. Voting, though it requires little initiative and cooperation with others, is the most visible and widespread form of citizen involvement. This notwithstanding, electoral turnout is declining in most democracies (Blais, 2000; Gray & Caul, 2000). Moreover, voters turnout varies considerably both overtime and across countries and individuals (Lassen, 2005). In Nigeria, voters have been showing lack of interest in election matters especially voting. There is an increase in apathy in the electioneering process. This paper intends to explore this condition and proffer solutions.

### **What is voter apathy?**

Crewe, Fox and Alt (1992) see the word Voter apathy as denoting a lack of feeling of personal responsibility, a passivity and indifference for political affairs. Subsequently, it denotes the absence of a feeling of personal obligation to participate in the voting process. Yakubu (2012) holds that, voter apathy is the indifference on the part of electorates as regards their attitude towards electoral processes such as voting. It is the absence of interest in, or concern about electoral process. In a similar view, Cloud (2010) maintains that, voter apathy occurs when eligible voters do not vote in public elections. Voter apathy thus, brings about low voter turnout. The word apathy is described as a lack of concern, enthusiasm or interest. Voter apathy occurs when voters decide that they really don't care who wins or loses, and this translates into very low voter turnout (the number of eligible voters who turn out to vote in an election vs the total number of eligible voters). Voter apathy can be caused by a lack of interest in the candidates that are running in an election, a general feeling

that a person's vote doesn't matter or even distrust in regards to how the election is actually being run. Voter apathy can be defined as the situation where the majority of the populace show a lack of interest towards voting and the voting process. It is usually a case where a person shows no interest in the matters and state of politics in his or her country. This means that he or she does not care about political parties, politicians, electoral processes, and even governance as a whole.

Voter apathy may be in three forms or types

- Apathy due to lack of trust in the voting process.
- Apathy due to lack of information.
- Apathy due to lack of interest.

Voter apathy is common among most Nigerians and it keeps increasing every year. Voter apathy is expressed in so many different ways:

- Many Nigerians refuse to belong to or support any political party.
- The low turn-out of Nigerians who are eligible to vote for the voters' registration process.
- The poor turn-out of voters during elections.
- Most Nigerians are not interested in protesting against bad governance and leadership in the country.

### **Causes of Voters apathy in Nigeria**

In politics, voter apathy is the lack of interest in the voting process in any election. It is expressed in apathy in participating in elections by certain groups of voters. One side-effect of voter apathy can be low voter turnout on election day if voting is non-compulsory. In countries or areas with compulsory elections, voter apathy may manifest itself in the form of a high proportion of spoilt ballots or donkey votes. Voter apathy can be caused by alienation and voter fatigue.

- **Alienation** - this refers to the sense that voters feel like the political system does not work for them and any attempt to influence it will be a fruitless exercise.
- **Voter fatigue** - this means that elections are simply deemed to be occurring too often. This is manifested especially in re-run elections where the turn out is far much lower than on the previous day of elections.

Voters are influenced by sociological factors such as income, occupation, education, gender, age, religion, ethnic background, geography, and family. Voters are also influenced by psychological factors such as political party identification, specific candidates, and key issues. There can be many reasons why people have a disinterest towards politics and governance. But here, we have listed major 9 reasons for political apathy in Nigeria:

#### **Rigging of elections.**

This is a major reason for the growing political apathy in Nigeria. Over the years, elections have been plagued with rigging and malpractices. And that is why most Nigerians don't believe in elections.

#### **The popular belief that the votes don't count.**

Most Nigerians believe that their votes do not count. This is one of the main reasons why a lot of Nigerians always refuse to turn out for voter registration. And during elections, most decide to stay back at home because of the general feeling and belief that their votes will have no impact on the outcome of the election.

#### **Lack of credible candidate.**

Since the beginning of the post-military era, there has been a continuous cycle of politicians. People do not have so many options from which they vote.

#### **Current condition of governance.**

This is probably the number one reason for political apathy in Nigeria. The government has failed to provide good leadership and governance for the country, as a result, the level of apathy towards politics and governance has increased.

#### **Lack of trust in governance.**

This is different from the dislike of politicians. In this case, this is an issue of not believing in the way of governance and lacking the interest to see governance improve. Most people also have lost hope of a better governance and therefore a reason for their political apathy.

#### **Campaign violence.**

Due to the level of violence that always occur during the build-up to elections, most people stay away from electoral process for the safety of their lives. Also, the violence was seen during campaign always damage the

credibility of most political parties and their candidates among the people. And because of this, the level of political apathy keeps growing.

### **Chaos in the political system.**

In Nigeria today, there is so much chaos going in politics and in the government. They include political oppression and victimization, political infighting, etc. Weak security measures during elections. Most people believe that their votes are not secured during elections. This is as a result of the history of election rigging, snatching of ballot boxes, disruption of voting centres by thugs, etc. And as a result, people don't participate in the voting process.

### **Negative media coverage.**

There is a lot of negative media coverage of politics and governance which builds up disinterest among voters. Nigerians don't like politicians. Large percentage of Nigerians don't like politicians for so many reasons. But the number one reason is that they do not believe in them and see them as thieves, liars, thugs, and people who have no compassion for the populace.

### **What are the effects of political apathy in Nigeria?**

According to Olawale (2018) the summary of some of the effects of political apathy in Nigeria are:

- Politicians are not held accountable for their actions.
- Continued imbalance of power can lead to civil wars and revolutions.
- High level of corruption and lawlessness flourish in the country.
- Greedy politicians keep getting into power.
- The development of the country becomes very slow

Election is therefore seen as a sanctioning device that induces elected officials to act in the best interest of the people. However, one vital condition that affects political accountability is the competitive electoral mechanism and at the core of the electoral mechanism is the vote. The vote is the primary thing for citizens to make their governments accountable. If a large fraction of citizens don't create their opinions, elections would create no incentives for politicians to espouse or implement policies in the public interest (Dalton 2007; Rakner and svsand 2005; English 2005; Chinisinger 2004; Ezeani; 2004 Ballington 2001; and Ragoff 1990).. All this notwithstanding, elections in developing nations have been characterized by lack of feeling of personal responsibility, a passivity and indifference for political affairs which could be viewed as apathy. The paper therefore, attempts to examine the causes of apathy in developing nations using Nigeria as a case study and what could be done to revive a genuine political participation using psychological interventions.

### **Voting Pattern in Presidential Elections Nigeria since 1979**

#### **11 August 1979 Presidential Election**

Registered Voters	48,633,782
Total Votes (Voter Turnout)	Not Available (N/A)

Invalid/Blank Votes	Not Available
Total Valid Votes	16,846,633

#### **6 August 1983 Presidential Election\***

Registered Voters	65,304,818
Total Votes (Voter Turnout)	Not Available (N/A)

Invalid/Blank Votes	Not Available
Total Valid Votes	25,430,096

#### **12 June 1993 Presidential Election\***

Registered Voters	39,000,000 (approx.)
Total Votes (Voter Turnout)	Not Available (N/A)

Invalid/Blank Votes	Not Available
Total Valid Votes	14,293,396

#### **27 February 1999 Presidential Election**

Registered Voters	57,938,945
Total Votes (Voter Turnout)	30,280,052 (52.3%)

Invalid/Blank Votes	431,611
Total Valid Votes	29,848,441

#### **19 April 2003 Presidential Election**

Registered Voters	60,823,022
Total Votes (Voter Turnout)	42,018,735 (69.1%)

Invalid/Blank Votes	2,538,246
Total Valid Votes	39,480,489

#### **21 April 2007 Presidential Election\***

Registered Voters	61,567,036
Total Votes (Voter Turnout)	Not Available (approx. 58%)

Invalid/Blank Votes	Not Available
Total Valid Votes	35,397,517

#### **16 April 2011 Presidential Election**

Registered Voters	73,528,040
Total Votes (Voter Turnout)	39,469,484 (53.7%)

Invalid/Blank Votes	1,259,506
Total Valid Votes	38,209,978

SOURCE: <http://africanelections.tripod.com/ng.html>

#### **Voter Behaviour and Political Participation in Nigeria since the Return of Civil Democratic Rule (1999)**

Political participation is the extent to which individual members of society share, take part or get involved in the life of that society (Agbaje, 1999). Political participation is an essential component that is required for ensuring the stability and legitimacy of every political system (Kumari & Kidwai, 1999). It is one of the fundamental ideas of a democratic society. It is the sine qua non of democracy, because democracy involves a commitment to equal opportunity for men and women to develop their individual capacities (Anifowose, 2004).

In Nigeria's post-independence democratic experience, political participation has been greatly influenced by ethno-national considerations. Some of the issues that have affected political participation in Nigeria and which in turn have reflected on aspects of the country's crisis of democracy and nation building includes ethno-national identity of political platforms and their loss of ideology (Olu-Adeyemi, 2017).

Thus, democracy is inconceivable without political participation (Agbaje, 1999). According to Pateman (1970) however, citizens' participation in politics is very important because it determines how much power is controlled. Thus in every society, the wielders of political power are very keen on ensuring at least some amount of political participation by the people. It is because of the important place that political participation occupies that Kumari and Kidwai (1999) asserts that its denial to substantial part of the population can result to explosive situation. Consequently, the political power that women or any group of persons in a society have would be linked directly to the degree of their participation in the political process of that society (Lewu, 2005).

Many studies have revealed that conventional forms of political participation, especially among young people, women, minorities and migrants, are currently in decline (e.g., Blais & Dobrzynska, 1998; Franklin, 2002; Putnam & Campbel, 2010). However, two different explanations have been put forward to explain this phenomenon: some authors argue that political apathy and alienation are increasing, whereas others argue that a shift is taking place from traditional forms of political participation to voluntary and less direct participatory activities using new means of social/political communication (Forbrig, 2005; Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins & Delli Carpini, 2006).

Current theories about political participation and social engagement take into account factors at the macro level (e.g., historical, institutional, political, demographic), the social level (e.g., family, school, peer group) and the micro level (e.g., collective efficacy, self-efficacy, trust) (Dalton & Klingemann, 2007). Over the years, there has been raging debates over the participation or desire of women in Nigerian politics. Some argue that women are weaker sexes owing to social value, norms and beliefs, which have neglected their meaningful contributions and have placed them in a subordinate position to men in the nation's political system (Suleiman 2017). This 'sexual division of labour' in the political system is often traced to the onset of colonialism in Nigeria. Their Western cultural notion of male superiority reflected in their relations with Nigerians. The 1922 Sir Hugh Clifford Constitution disenfranchised Nigerian women and limited the participation of adult male to the wealthy. This is not to say that there was no existing element of gender inequality in traditional state and stateless societies in Nigeria but that the colonial order made gender discrimination more pronounced. In traditional Yoruba states in South West Nigeria, for example, women held high political offices like the *Iyalode*, *Iyaloja*, *Iyalaje* and even the office of the *Oba*. But at the establishment of the colonial order, women became estranged to these rights politically, but in the Yoruba Kingdoms they could still perform their traditional roles.

The political enfranchisement of women in Nigeria politics seems to have maintained on the surface a level of gender equity politically, because it is assumed that constitutionally there are no barriers to women's participation. Throughout recorded history in all part of the world, women have been subjected to domination by men. This is as a result of persisting cultural stereotype, abuse of religious and traditional practices, patriarchal societal structures in which economic, political and social power are dominated by men and the role women have historically played as the followers of male political leaders. This form of discrimination has induced voter apathy especially among women voters. Women are unjustifiably discriminated against in many ways. For instance in some courts and police stations in Nigeria today, women who propose to stand for sureties for accused persons have been disqualified simply because they are women. In spite of the fact that world over today, democracy has become a vital tool for attaining sustainable development and the impact of the definition of democracy remains elusive. Political participation which is sine qua non of democracy and allows for diversity of opinion and participation of both men and women cannot thrive by excluding the women folk that constitute half of the world's population. According to Anifowose (2004) some established democracies like Britain and the U.S., democratic polyarchies, for a long time, were in fact male polyarchies. Even famous advocates of democratic and republican government rejected claims that women should be full citizens. For the most part, they adopted the prevailing view that the proper role of women was marriage, procreation and family, not politics. Thus, John Locke held that "all men are by nature equal, they never recommended that women be allowed to vote and considered it more or less self-evident that in family matters, the husbands have the final say (Anifowose, 2004).

### **How does identity influence our voting Behaviour?**

We have two general types of identities; one is on an individual level and one on a collective one. As we grow, our sense of identity also grows. We have seen cases in which individuals are willing to let go of their individual identities to make a sacrifice for their collective ones. People who share the same collective identity think of themselves as having a common interest and a common fate. Nigeria is a plural society made up of over 250 ethnic groups with many sub-groups. Three major ethnic groups -Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo -dominate the political landscape while other ethnic groups are regarded as minorities. This has created sub-nationalism. Ekeh (1973) has argued that ethnicity has flourished because the Nigerian elite who inherited the colonial state have conceptualized development as transferring resources from the civil public to the primordial public. The ethnicity of Nigeria is so varied that there is no definition of a Nigerian beyond that of someone who lives within the borders of the country (Okpu, 1985). Yet, the concept of ethnicity and ethnic identity in Nigeria requires definition. An "ethnic group" could be described as a "group of people having a common language and cultural values". These common factors are emphasized by frequent interaction between the people in the group.

In Nigeria, the ethnic groups are occasionally fusions created by intermarriage, intermingling and/or assimilation. In such fusions, the groups of which they are composed maintain a limited individual identity. The groups are thus composed of smaller groups, but there is as much difference between even the small groups; as Chief Obafemi Awolowo puts it, as much as there is between Germans, English, Russians and Turks. The count of three hundred ethnic groups and above in Nigeria overwhelmingly enumerates ethnic minority groups, those which do not comprise a majority in the region in which they live. These groups usually do not have a political voice, nor do they have access to resources or the technology needed to develop and modernize economically. They therefore often consider themselves discriminated against, neglected, or

oppressed. There are only three ethnic groups which have attained "ethnic majority" status in their respective regions: The Hausa-Fulani in the north, the Igbo in the southeast, and the Yoruba in the southwest. Ethnicity is one of the keys to understanding Nigeria's pluralistic society. It distinguishes groupings of peoples who for historical reasons have come to be seen as distinctive by themselves and others on the basis of locational origins and a series of other cultural markers.

It is also worth noting that when it comes to identity, while some traits are fixed at birth such as parental religion or place of birth and the color of skin, some others can be modified later in life such as religion practiced or language spoken. So it can be ascribed or achieved. Therefore, many identities are gained by choice or expanded upon by the individual's perception and self growth process.

Now the question would be how do we form these identities which influence our voting behavior?

### **Psychological factors influencing how people form their identities**

According to Tsang, Hui and Law (2012) a person's identity is shaped by many factors such as nationality, race, ethnic group, physical appearance, culture, talents, interests, language, and religion. All of these factors may affect one's identity but few of them affect it significantly.

### **How group identification influences self identity**

#### **a. Ethnicity Identity**

Ethnicity is a social phenomenon that is manifested in interactions among individuals of different ethnic groups within a political system where language and culture are the most prominent attributes. The formation of dialects within languages was one of the ways in which ethnicity – both small-scale and large-scale – became fixed in Nigeria. Although there are over 400 languages in Nigeria, only three are considered important while the rest are considered minor languages. However, the distribution of these languages is directly proportional to both political and socio-economic power, and therefore the language group to which one belongs defines his/her status in the society. Missionaries and local politicians created standard languages and hoped that they would homogenise language and ethnicity, and create more harmonious ethnic identities. Ethnicity is natural in almost all societies made up of more than one ethnic group. This observation tends to offer the suggestion that the interaction between different ethnic groups within a single political set-up generates ethnic identity. An interaction of this kind can create 'a common consciousness of being one in relation to other relevant ethnic groups' (Eriksen 1996:30). That in turn, results in the emergence of in-group and out-group confines which come to be guarded jealously over time. Based on this approach, ethnicity thus becomes a process through which ethnic identities are politicised (Eriksen 1996).

Historically, identities have played a significant role in the Nigerian political process during the colonial period and in the post-colonial era. During the colonial period, the administrators allowed the emergence and aggravation of an 'us' versus 'them' syndrome, where Muslims were pitted against Christians, Northerners against the Southerners, HausaFulani, Yoruba and Igbo against each other, and so on (Adefemi 2003; Okpanachi 2010). In this era religious and ethnic differences became prominent factors in instituting and executing socio-economic strategies and applications. Therefore, the differentiating outcomes of colonialism became the forerunner of the socio-economic disequilibrium among the different regions, and then this became an important factor in the stimulation of identity awareness so as to efficiently 'divide and rule' (Fearon & Laitin 2003; Okpanachi 2010). But, as a counter argument it must be said that internal factors are more determinant than the external ones in creating the cleavages in Nigeria. This is also the case in many other countries.

Ethnicity is seen as the most basic and politically salient identity of Nigerians. This argument is based on the premise that in their competitive and non-competitive contexts, Nigerians tend to define themselves in terms of ethnic affinities as opposed to other identities (Osaghae & Suberu 2005). A survey conducted in Nigeria by Lewis and Bratton (2000) found that almost half of Nigerians (48.2%) labelled themselves with an ethnic identity compared to 28.4% who labelled themselves with respect to class and 21% who identified with a religious group (Lewis & Bratton 2000; Osaghae & Suberu 2005). This means that over 66% of Nigerians view themselves as members of an elemental ethnic or religious group. What is even more interesting is the fact that religious and ethnic identities are more salient than class identities (Lewis and Bratton 2000:26; Osaghae and Suberu 2005:9). However, this is not at all that surprising, especially if one considers that ethno-religious formations are the most persistent behavioural units in Nigeria (Nsongola-Ntalaja 2004:404; Osaghae and Suberu 2005:9).

Nevertheless, notwithstanding the fact that ethnicity is the most salient, and the large number of studies conducted on this issue, the total number of ethnic groupings in Nigeria remains unknown (Osaghae and Suberu 2005:9). Some sources put it at 374 (Otite 1990:34; Okpanachi 2010), while some other sources count more than 250 different ethnic identities (Central Intelligence Agency 2016). However, the population

percentages of the majority of these groups are small when compared with the seven largest ethnic groups constituting about 88% of the country's population. These are Hausa and Fulani (29%), Yoruba (21%), Igbo (18%), Ijaw (10%), Kanuri (4%), Ibibio (3,5%), and Tiv (2,5%) (Central Intelligence Agency 2016). This population disproportion when combined with the disparities in the political influence of individual ethnic groups roughly classifies the Nigerian population into two major groupings: the majority and minority ethnic groups. When the Hausa-Fulani, the Yoruba and the Igbo form the majority, the rest of the ethnic groups are fitted into the minority classification which in itself possesses different degrees of status relative to their size and political influence (Rakov 1990; Paden 2008; Okpanachi 2010).

The Hausa-Fulani and other smaller ethnic groups that inhabit the north of the country are Muslims while the Igbo and the other smaller groups residing in the South are primarily Christians. Groups lying in the middle comprise a mixture of Christians and Muslims while the Yoruba found in the Southwest are almost half Muslim and half Christian. This Muslim North and Christian South cleavage enhances ethnic fractionalisations in Nigeria, especially in Northern Nigeria where Islamic identity plays a dominant role (Paden 2007; Okpanachi 2010). It is clear that nearly the entire Northern half of the country consists of states with Sharia law. Of course, exceptions should not be overlooked for both parts of the country. There is a considerable population of Muslims in the South, especially in the Southwest, and a sizeable number amongst the Benin in Edo State. Even in the Southeast, amongst the Igbo, there has been a rising number of Muslims, causing the governors of some Igbo-speaking states to introduce state programmes for Muslims. The same goes for Christians in the North, where the considerable number of Christians cannot be disregarded in any analysis of religious groupings in Nigeria. Lewis (2007) attributes the historical prominence of Islam during the formation of Northern states in the early 19th century to the continued prominence of Emirs and religious authorities in framing identities in Northern Nigeria. Lewis argues that a number of principles of ethnicity are used by political leaders and others to frame their arguments as to how things should be accomplished. First, ethnic identity is the most important and consistent basis of social identity in the country.

### **Second, ethnicity is seen as a way for collective action.**

Finally, ethnicity is presumed to be a destabilising factor with far-reaching impacts on democracy. These principles breed a number of outcomes. Because political competition is played along lines of ethnicity, the resultant 'democratic' but authoritarian government ostensibly has an ethnic character (Lewis, 2007). Lewis states that civilian governments supposedly promote the creation of an ethnic politicisation and political schism. On the other hand, nondemocratic regimes like military rules are usually repercussions from the side of the political elite. In most cases, therefore, mechanisms of political governance are formed on the basis of ethnicity via custom-made patronage systems (Nwankwo & Agu, 2018).

For instance, in Nigeria the ethnic factor is seen when political parties are formed and during elections. The Northern People's Congress (NPC) was formed in the first Republic and it was a Hausa-Fulani party. Similarly, the Igbos belonged to the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC) while the Yoruba prided themselves as members of the Action Group (AG) (Cohen, 1968). These parties later transformed into The National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the Nigerian People Party (NPP) and the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) during the second republic (Edoh, 2001). The third Republic, attributed to the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and National Republican Convention (NRC), was disbanded by annulment of the June 12, 1993 elections due to ethnic reasoning when it became clear that the Northern political hegemony risked being lost forever. Thus, here it is possible to detect that stimulation of ethnic awareness easily turns into a conflict in order to get more from scarce societal resources. And this situation provokes political tensions and cleavages among the ethnic groups. Nigeria is not the only country in the world where such things are experienced.

In recent times, socio-economic and political changes have taken place and transformed the delineations of identities and politics in Nigeria. To begin with, patterns of group mobilisations have shifted. In the traditional models of Nigerian ethnic politics, emphasis was on competition among the country's three largest groups – the Hausa-Fulani, the Yoruba and the Igbo. The minority groups comprising over 250 smaller ethnic groups have often been regarded as inconsequential in political contests. However, since 1999, Nigeria's political arena has been changing following political action by groups in the Niger Delta and the 'middle-belt' communities who have increasingly become vocal in national politics and economy (Soludo 2007). Ethnic solidarity has also faced opposition from religious mobilisations by the Muslims and the Christians especially in the Muslim North. Since the restoration of democratic rule, ethnic identity and mobilisation in the Nigerian political landscape has often resulted in political instability. Between 1999 and 2013, more than 11 000 deaths have occurred as a result of more than five hundred incidents of communal violence. Ethnic violence has been witnessed in almost all regions in the country but with particular frequency

in the Niger Delta, the Muslim North and Northwest, and along the middle-belt (Uzodike & Whetho, 2011). The level of insecurity witnessed during the post-military period is considerably higher than that experienced during the three decades of military rule that ended

### **b. Religious identity**

Nigeria is the most crowded African country with a population of about 182 million by 2015 (World Population Prospects, 2015). A majority of the scientific academic sources accept that the half of the population is Christian, the other half Muslim. However, there is uncertainty about the exact percentages, hence various sources give different figures (Pew Research Center 2010). Whatever the exact percentages are, it is clear that Nigeria is a country with very large Christian and Muslim populations. This situation makes this country a potential fault line between the two different identities and even civilisations. In this sense, Nigeria, with the largest Christian plus Muslim population in the world, can be defined as a 'cleft country' and then a 'test case' of Huntington's Clash of Civilisations thesis (Paden, 2007; Olojo, 2014). Although the general presumption is that ethnic identity is a more prominent and stable source of identity in Nigeria, some researchers have demonstrated that religion was more significant than ethnicity as a source of identity and conflict in Nigeria (Ruby & Shah 2007; Pew Research Center 2010; Green 2011). In fact, in the Hausa-Fulani North, religious identity is more pronounced than ethnic identity and only serves to stimulate ethnicity (Osaghae & Suberu 2005). Therefore, of the two major ethnic groupings in the country, the Yoruba are more likely to identify themselves with their ethnic group than are the Northern Hausa/Fulani (Lewis & Bratton, 2000; Osaghae & Suberu, 2005). Nigeria has three major religious identities: Christian, Islam and traditional religions (Omorogbe & Omohan, 2005; Osaghae & Suberu, 2005). Traditional religions are the most politically inactive of the three groups, 'numbering several hundreds of ethnic groups and sub-groups, villages, clans and kin groups; and, involving the worship of different gods and goddesses' (Osaghae & Suberu 2005:11). On the other hand, Christian and Muslim identities have continued to be the backbone of religious disparity and conflict (Lewis & Bratton, 2000; Osaghae & Suberu, 2005). This differentiation underlies the pattern of voting behavior in Nigeria. It is very obvious that our identities in Nigeria is greatly influenced by our religious inclination as well as the ethnic orientation. The fact that an average Nigerian is very religious was observed by some sources (Oluduro, 2010; Ekundayo, 2013). Religion plays a critical role in Nigerian society and has expressed itself as a potent force in the geopolitical development of the country. This force which has been used to unite Nigerians is the same force that has led to numerous conflicts in the country. However, according to Nwankwo and Agu, (2018) developing a sense of identity in Nigeria is an issue of one's personality traits. This means that we first develop our personality traits before forming our sense of identity. Interestingly, this implies that religious orientation plays a great role in shaping our personality traits. This religious orientation is embedded in the roles parents play during parenting.

It has been observed that voting patterns and behavior are determined greatly by religious influence and affiliation. In the last two general elections of 2015 and 2019 religion played greater roles in how people voted. This is a bad trend which in future can make people not to participate in the electoral process simply because their Pastor or Imam or Alfa said so

### **Ingroup-outgroup phenomenon and Impact on Voter Apathy**

An outgroup is any group that you don't belong to, while an ingroup is a group that you associate yourself with. One basis for stereotypes is the tendency to see members of an outgroup as similar (called outgroup homogeneity) and members of your ingroup as different from each other (called ingroup heterogeneity). Social groups have a profound impact on the lifestyles that individuals may lead (Hogg & Vaughn, 2008), and categorising people into social groups is a skill that human beings exhibit from a young age. It is interesting to note that our voting behavior is influenced by a lot of groups and subgroups such as the family, church and mosque, social affiliations, age grade groups etc. In addition, Social groups influence how we hold value-laden attitudes and beliefs which differentiate between one's own group and other groups. In particular, when competition between groups is introduced or when "threat" is detected about another group in such a context, individuals attitudes towards group members are enhanced (Nesdale, Durkin, Maass & Griffiths, 2005).

Ingroup bias refers to individuals showing a preference for others perceived to be in the same social group (ingroup) versus those from another group (outgroup) ((Hogg & Vaughn, 2008). This bias can be a strategy for anchoring a positive identity and there is evidence for ingroup bias to positively and causally affect the way people feel about themselves. This phenomenon has been implicated in the voting behavior of electorates. This is in line with the key premise of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner 1979). This theory posits that an individual's sense of identity is derived from social group memberships and that identification with the ingroup often leads to the formation of ingroup bias as they place greater importance on the group to which they belong. Concomitantly, prejudice against outgroups (outgroup bias) may arise even if there is no

history of rivalry or the distinctions between groups are superficial (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy & Flament, 1971), although it has long been established that even trivial competition between groups can raise the levels of intergroup biases (Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood & Sherif, 1961).

A practical example is the voting boycott advocated by the members of Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) during the last 2019 general elections. The leadership of the group instructed its members to stay indoors on the days of election in order not to vote. This instruction was religiously been adhered to until its members reversed its earlier directive and finally asked her members to turn out and vote on the day of elections (Punch, [February 15, 2019](#))

### **Applying Psycho-social principles in reversing Voters Apathy in Nigeria**

In the literature reviewed it's obvious that voters apathy is attitudinal and reversing the trend will require the use of psychological behavior modification techniques. As an attitudinal disposition, emphasis will be on targeting the attitudinal components of feeling (affective) and thinking (cognitive).

#### ***Affective Restructuring***

A growing literature on the significance of [affect](#) in politics finds that affective states play a role in public voting behavior that can be both beneficial and biasing. Affect here refers to the experience of emotion or feeling, which is often described in contrast to [cognition](#). It is largely believed in psychology that affective states are involved in human judgment and decision-making (*Winkielman, Knutson, Paulus & Trujillo, 2007*). In exploring the benefits of affect on voting, researchers have argued that affective states such as anxiety and enthusiasm encourage the evaluation of new political information and thus benefit political behavior by leading to more considered choices. Others, however, have discovered ways in which affect such as emotion and mood can significantly bias the voting choices of the [electorate](#). For example, evidence has shown that a variety of events that are irrelevant to the evaluation of candidates but can stir emotions, such as the outcome of league football matches preceding the election day and weather can significantly influence voter apathy (*Healy, Malhotra, Hyunjung & Cecilia, 2010; Gomez, Hansford & Krause, 2007*).

Several variables have been proposed that may moderate the relationship between emotion and voting. Researchers have shown that one such variable may be **political sophistication**, with higher sophistication voters more likely to experience emotions in response to [political stimuli](#) and thus more prone to [emotional biases](#) in voting choice. *Political sophistication* is a construct in the field of *political* psychology. It concerns the extent to which a person has knowledge of *political* activity, assimilates information and forms *political* views. This is possible because as human beings, we learn about the things we care about. Therefore interest precedes and enhances political education. Voters will show significant interest in the electoral process when they realize that they are stakeholders in the governance of their State.

Another variable is **Affective intensity** has also been shown to moderate the relationship between affect and voting, with one study finding a doubling of estimated effect for higher-intensity affective shocks. Affect intensity is a stable individual difference characteristic defined in terms of the typical strength of an individual's responsiveness. ... An arousal regulation theory is proposed to account for individual differences in affective response intensity. Increasing the electorates affective intensity requires targeting the emotions with positive advertorials on the positive impact of voting to choose a credible and effective leader. Such sensitization will increase their feeling of wanting to vote on the Election Day.

Another variable which has been shown to influence voting behaviour is the **weather**. Hot temperatures can have divergent effects on human behavior due to the fact that it can lead to heightened arousal (Oishi, 2014). As such, increases in arousal due to increases in temperature might impact the turnout of voters on an election day (*Van-Assche, 2017*). Previous studies have found that hot temperatures increase anger (Bushman, Wang & Anderson, 2005) which, in turn, motivates people to vote (Van-Zomeren, 2016). This paper advocates that the election process should not exceed 12 noon. Better still we should adopt the electronic voting system whereby intending and eligible voters can vote from the comfort of their homes, offices etc

#### **Cognitive Restructuring**

It's important to note that human judgment and decision making is ubiquitous and voluntary behavior implicitly or explicitly requires judgment and choice. Voting behavior is a choice which is dependent on several factors such as interest, intrinsic and extrinsic benefits, personality dispositions etc. Voter apathy is as a result of learned helplessness as most voters have given up hope that their votes will count and thereby trusting fate that a change will occur. However, to effectively change the thinking of the voters in this direction, there is need for the government through the election umpire (INEC) to exhibit transparency and accountability in the subsequent elections. Changing or generating alternative thoughts can only happen when

the people have “seen” how credible subsequent elections are conducted. This is very necessary because our cognitions are expressed in emotional responses. Therefore to re-rate the intensity of our emotional response will go a long way in changing and restructuring our cognition towards elections in Nigeria.

### **Conclusion**

Psychologists have created a 3-stage framework in order to assist politicians with improving their relationship with their electorate which will increase voters participation in the electoral process. Building upon models developed by the Government Social Research Unit as cited by Fogg (2009), this paper will adopt the three stages which are: IDENTIFY, UNDERSTAND and COMMUNICATE, This will all stakeholders (INEC, Political parties, Aspirants etc) to develop better strategies aimed at connecting and engaging with the electorates which will reduce voters apathy.

### **Identify**

- Identify who are the voters, and where are they?

Tackle the numbers not registered to vote by enabling them to vote by coming en masse in the next election thereby reducing the numbers who can't vote.

- Identify the range of target audiences for voting.

Build this knowledge around valid and reliable data analysis of demographic variables (age, gender, religion, ethnicity, nationality, etc.).

### **Understand**

Understand what is important to voters and why?

- Develop a deep understanding of the range of issues that are important to the various target audiences. It is no longer sufficient for politicians to apply over-simplistic one-issue determinants of voting incentives. This was evident during the EU Referendum by assuming the primary motivation for Leave voters was immigration, and for Remain voters it was the economy.
- Understand the complex interactions between similar and competing issues, recognising that both similar and different issues will resonate with the different target audiences.

### **Communicate**

Develop an effective communication link with voters.

- a. Maximise reach and exposure
- b. Focus on issues that are important to the target audiences
- c. Tap into personal relevance
- d. Value their emotion and experience
- e. Validate their authenticity and uniqueness
- f. Seek advocacy and endorsement

Finally, no matter how bad things are presently in Nigeria, there is hope for a change. We need to educate our people to know that voting is their civic duty. It behoves on every person up to the age of 18 to know that he or she must exercise that right to vote. Politics should not be perceived as a career or venture for fraudsters, miscreants and jobless people. Professionals and technocrats can be involved. Also the school environment where student Union governments are birthed and nurtured should be resuscitated and transparency allowed. Together Nigeria can be great again.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Attendance at this conference was partly sponsored by Chrisland University, Ajebo Road as part of its support of staff development programme. This is well appreciated.