

Interrogating the Proportionality of Electoral Budget and Voter Turnout in Nigeria's Presidential Elections

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Abstract

The proportion of the electoral budget and voter turnout during presidential elections in Nigeria has become a source of concern for stakeholders and an indictment of the Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) and the Federal Republic of Nigeria since 1999. The sharp decline in voter turnout on Election Day and the proportional increase in the election budget have raised significant doubts about the electoral process. The study examines the proportionality of the variables, Electoral Budget and Voter Turnout, in the Presidential elections from 1999 to 2023. Voter turnout is associated with numerous factors, which the study has outlined and proffered a way forward. Secondary data were deployed through the review of relevant literature. Deductive techniques were used in the data analysis. The findings revealed a sharp decline in voter turnout and electoral participation, while there has been a continuous and significant increase in the electoral budget in every election year since the inception of democracy in 1999. Only a fraction of the population had voted for a President in Nigeria since 1999. The study recommends massive and strategic voter education, a complete overhaul of the electoral system to boost voters' confidence, and the Remote Mobile Voting System (RMVS) adaptation.

Keywords: Budget, Participation, Voter Turnout, Nigeria, INEC

Introduction

Akanji & Abdalla (2018) noted that elections are costly endeavours in all democracies, whether consolidated or transitional. Organizing a successful and credible election is a significant drain on the national revenue of every democratic country, Experience has shown that while mature democracies such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada face economic costs due to large electoral budgets, developing or emerging democracies, particularly in Africa, encounter both economic and social burdens. (Aiyede, & Aregbeyen, 2011). In Nigeria, in addition to the substantial resources drawn from the public purse to fund elections, declarations of public holidays and the closure of national borders contribute further economic strains on the country. Moreover, deaths, destruction of public and private property, and internal displacement resulting from electoral violence represent the social costs of elections in Nigeria. (Aluko, 1999).

For instance, while INEC budgeted a staggering N305 billion for the recently concluded 2023 election, the pre- and post-election violence that characterised the poll resulted in significant human and material losses. The Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, a consortium of domestic observer groups, reports that 626 people were killed during the 2019 elections, a figure significantly higher than the 106 deaths recorded in 2015. Within the 2019 figure, the North West geo-political zone of the Nigerian federation (where President Muhammadu Buhari hails from) recorded the highest number of fatalities, with 172 deaths (Situation Room, 2019).

Several instances have been made of successful elections which accounted for heavy tolls on the public purse (Gidlund, 1991). For instance, India spent the sum of 600m USD on the country's 2014 general elections in which over 553m voters cast the ballot (Abdallah, 2018). In Canada, the 2015 federal elections, in which 17 million voters participated, cost the former British colony a staggering 443m USD, translating to a per-voter cost of 17 USD. The 2015 figure was higher by 53 % than the 2011 elections, which gulped 293m USD (Election Canada, 2016).

In the United Kingdom, the 2015 parliamentary elections cost the country 114,733 m GBP, with 30.8m voters out of the eligible 46.4m voters turning out for polling (UK Government, 2018). The hotly contested 2016 presidential and congressional elections, which produced Donald John Trump as the 45th president of the United States of America, cost the American treasury 6.5 billion USD, with 130 million voters casting the ballot (OpenSecrets, 2017). In Kenya, the 2017 general and re-run elections of August 8 and October 26, respectively, cost the East African country 536m USD (African News, 2018), while Nigeria's close neighbour, Ghana, expended 152m USD on the 2016 presidential and parliamentary polls (Ghana Web, 2019).

Understanding the Concepts

Electoral Budget: This refers to the financial plan outlining projected income and expenses for conducting elections. It is divided into two: fixed costs and variable costs. Fixed costs are the ongoing expenses for the ordinary functioning of electoral administration, such as maintaining voter registration databases and electoral infrastructure, while variable costs are expenses directly related to the conduct of elections, like voting operations, counting, and dispute adjudication. (Election Canada, 2016)

As a rule, electoral budgets tend to be part of the consolidated budget of the nation on an annual cycle. In a non-election year, the budget for the Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs), whatever shape it takes, is usually a line item of the national budget or is included within the budget of the larger agency of which the electoral administration is part, like the National Independent Electoral Commission INEC. (Ojo, 2015). In an election year, the corresponding budget is funded from the national budget by following ordinary or extraordinary procedures, depending on whether the elections could be anticipated or were called unexpectedly. Flexibility is particularly necessary in parliamentary systems in which governments may collapse unexpectedly or a prime minister may call an election at any time within a given term of office. (Samuels, 2001)

Electoral budgets can be structured into different categories, including direct costs and diffuse costs. Direct costs are readily identified, such as costs associated with voting operations and electoral materials, while diffuse Costs are difficult to assess or track, like the contribution of civil registries to voter list production or police support during elections. Funding sources for electoral budgets can come from National funding, State funding, international funding and public and private funding. (James & Jervier, 2018)

Voter Turnout: Voter turnout refers to the percentage of eligible voters who cast a ballot in an election. It's a key measure of civic participation and democratic health. High turnout often reflects strong engagement and confidence in the democratic process. Low turnout can signal apathy, disenfranchisement, or dissatisfaction with choices or the system. Voter Turnout Rate

(VTR) is usually calculated by several people who voted divided by the number of eligible voters' times 100. (Gafar, 2015)

IIDEA (2002) asserted that it is instructive to understand that registered voter turnout only includes those registered. Voting-age population (VAP) turnout includes all citizens of voting age, whether registered or not. Voting-eligible population (VEP) includes people who are of age but not eligible (e.g., non-citizens, prisoners, etc.).

According to Aluaigba (2015), presidential elections usually have higher turnout than midterms or local elections; therefore, ease of registration, early voting, mail-in ballots, and ID requirements can influence turnout depending on the electoral law of a given country. Socioeconomic factors such as education, income, and age play big roles in older, wealthier, and more educated people voting more. Political climate, such as high-stakes elections or controversial issues, can drive more people to vote. Trust in the system also plays an important role, where people who feel their vote matters are more likely to participate. Some countries have mandatory voting (e.g., Australia) and thus have very high turnout. (Lewis and Alemika, 2005)

Voter Apathy and Low Turnout on Election Day

The present electoral system in Nigeria has created the potential for citizens to predict winners even before casting their votes. According to Seun Akinyemi (2019), "*President Buhari was elected in 2019 by 18% of Nigeria's registered voters. Is democracy in an African country still based on majority rule?*" Democracy In Africa, DIA (2019) lamented that the citizen apathy situation becomes direr, especially when taking into account the numbers that voted for the top two presidential candidates – Muhammadu Buhari and Atiku Abubakar. Of the 28.6 million that voted, President Muhammadu Buhari of APC, the declared winner, got 15,191,847 votes to beat his nearest rival, Atiku Abubakar of PDP, who polled 11,262,978 votes. In calculating the percentages of the registered voters, Buhari and Atiku were voted for by a paltry 18.5% and 13.7% of the registered voters, respectively.

Factors Militating Against Voter Turnout in Nigeria

Democracy in Africa, DIA (2019) highlighted that citizen apathy in Nigeria is due to many factors; however, the subsequent factors are presumably the most important factors obstructing Nigerians from taking part in their country's electoral processes.

Bad governance: The approach to politics and governance practised in Nigeria discourages people from taking part in the electoral processes of governance in Nigeria, which is characterised by deceit and unsuccessful guarantees

ii. ***Religious Affiliations:*** Faith and beliefs hinder a major portion of Nigerians from contributing positively to democratic governance. For instance, the Jehovah's Witness faith is nonpolitical, supporting what they believe the bible teaches. They do not lobby, vote for political parties or candidates, run a business office, or participate in any action to change government. They believe Jesus Christ educated his disciples not to be a part of the happenings of the world. So, they see no reason to contribute to political solutions. On the other hand, the politicisation of Shari'ah additionally deepens women's domestication and limits their political participation. During the 2019 election, Muslim female politicians were quickly reminded of their non-secular obligations by men who controlled the non-secular space. The

implementation of Shari'ah served as a tool in the hands of some politicians to discourage women's participation as candidates for public office and voters in the 2019 elections.

iii. **Political Violence:** The crime, chaos, and violence that characterise some polling units and collation centres in Nigeria have created worry and distrust among Nigerians. This has led most citizens to neglect their civic duties and responsibilities. Throughout the 2019 elections, political thugs and troopers were allegedly involved in the disruption of electoral processes at the polling units and collation centres. According to both local and foreign observers, over 25 people were killed during the Presidential and National Assembly elections that were held on the 13th of February 2019

IV. **Lack of Trust in the Election Management Body, INEC:** In most cases, politicians can't rig an election without INEC officers facilitating it directly or indirectly. This gave some voters the notion that even after they vote, their votes do not count. Winners and losers of elections are determined by some political bigwigs and INEC officers before the contest. Most Nigerians believe that voters solely move to the polls to waste their time. (Democracy In Africa, 2019)

v. **Delays and Tendency for Result Manipulations and Rigging:** Most times, fraudulent electoral officers deliberately delay the delivery and announcement of election results, thanks to tendencies and prospects of rigging and manipulation of the electoral outcome. In these cases, like this, most times, voters are intimidated or pestered to leave the collation centres. (Democracy in the continent, 2019).

Methodology

The study employed a mixed method for data gathering, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data. Much of the data from secondary sources was obtained from numerous literature sources, particularly from the internet. Key Google searches included: "Electoral budget", "Voter turnout", "Presidential Elections", "Nigerian Electoral Turnout", and "Voter apathy". Data from authorities such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) of Nigeria were utilised for pertinent information on the structure, processes, and methods adopted since the commencement of the democratic process in 1999. Additionally, data from the National Democratic Institute (NDI) for International Affairs in Washington, DC, related to Nigeria's Presidential elections, were also employed. The study focused solely on Presidential elections in Nigeria from 1999 to 2023.

Results/Findings

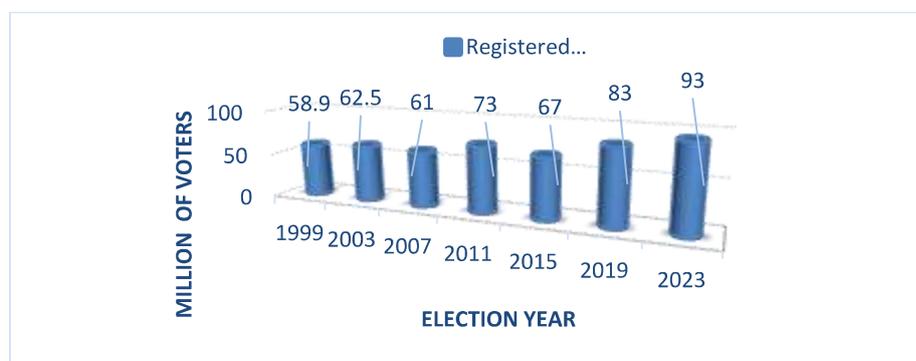


Figure 1: Trend of Registered Voters in Nigeria for General Elections from 1999 to 2023

Source: INEC, 2024.

Figure 1 shows the trend of registered voters from 1999 to 2023. There has been an appreciable increase in the voter consciousness to come out and register for elections, from 58.9 million to 93.1 million prospective eligible voters. Nigerians have always shown interest in voting and also exercise their civic right in that direction.

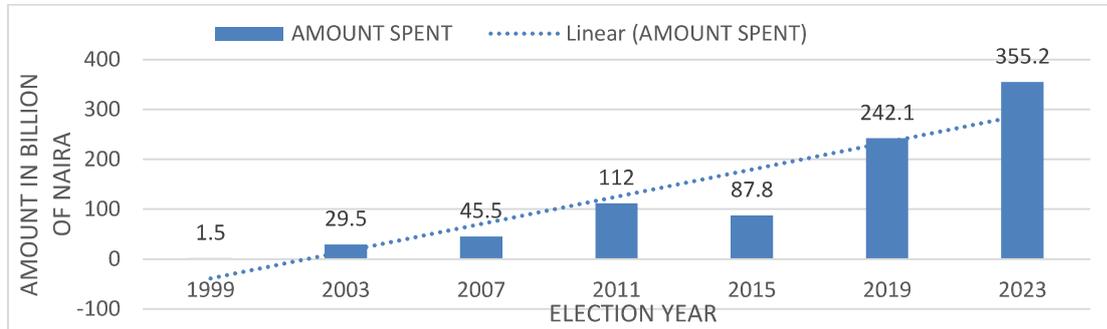


Figure 2: Electoral Budget in Nigeria for General Elections from 1999 to 2023

Source: INEC, 2024.

Figure 2 shows the trend of electoral budget for general elections from 1999 to 2023. It shows that there has been tremendous increase in the electoral budget which rose from 1 billion naira in 1999 to 355 billion naira in 2023. Inflation and other determining factors including increase registered voters as shown in Figure 1 may have contributed to the huge budget.

Huge Cost Burden of Conducting Elections: The Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC (2024), has attributed the high cost of conducting elections to prevailing insecurity in most regions of the country and the required peaceful existence amongst Nigerians. Similarly, Ayo Baje (2019) warned that the ever-increasing prices of conducting free, fair, peaceful, and credible elections in Nigeria, which might be acceptable to any or all of the stakeholders, ought to be a source of deep concern to well-meaning voters. Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) (2021) stated that it spent N112.9 billion for the exercise back in 2011 and N108.8 billion in 2015; however, the Commission budgeted N242 billion as approved in the 2019 elections. (INEC, 2021)

The Election Network (2019) ascertained that the cost of elections in the Federal Republic of Nigeria continues to rise exponentially, most that Nigeria’s elections became the foremost expensive in the world with the value soaring from a touch on top of N1 billion in 1999 (Nigeria’s initial democratic election year) to over N200 billion in 2019.

Adamu (2019) lamented that the electoral expenditure started at N1.5 billion in 1999 and rose to N29 billion in 2002, N45.5 billion in 2006, N111 billion in 2010, and down to N87.8 billion in 2014. In 2019, President Muhammadu Buhari presented a budget of N242 billion for the elections. To date, the funds given to INEC for the elections remain unaccounted for, similar to those from the previous years.

The Election Network (2019) ran through the electoral budget between 1999 and 2018. INEC received N730.99 billion as fund allocations from the central government, in step with official documents reviewed by Daily Trust News. Of the huge sum, N450 billion was captured as ‘electoral expenditure,’ whereas N191.8 billion was cited as ‘personnel value,’ N36.9 billion as ‘overhead cost,’ and N54.7 billion was logged under ‘capital expenditure.’

Faces International Magazine (2019) thought that INEC maintains over 800 offices and 16,000 regular staff nationwide, hires thousands of ad-hoc staff who are mainly corps members, and acquires sensitive materials abroad due to integrity deficit and trust issues in the country. In 2019, according to the Chief Press Secretary to the INEC Chairman, Rotimi Oyekanmi, “Nigeria is a big country, and the population is quite high. So many things are put in place for elections in Nigeria. We hire a lot of ad-hoc staff for elections. We have the security apparatus. We have the ballot boxes and papers, and other sensitive materials we acquire abroad due to an integrity deficit and trust issues in the country. A lot of logistics go into elections in Nigeria.”

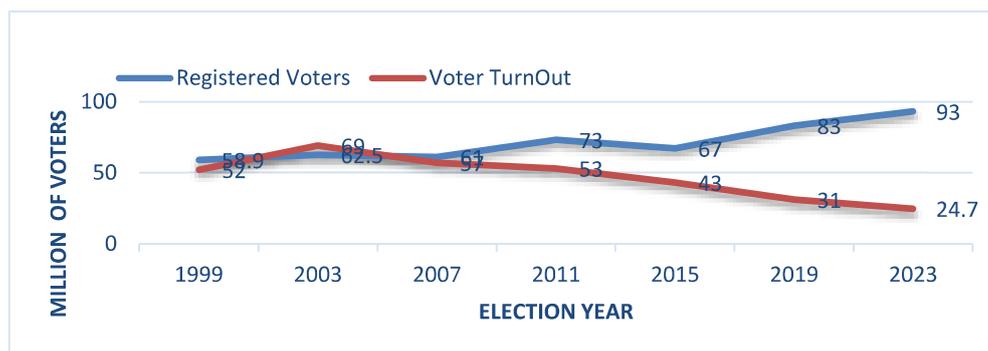


Figure 3: Registered Voters and Voter Turnout During Presidential Election from 1999 to 2023

Source: INEC, 2024.

Figure 3 shows the proportionality between the confirmed registered voters and the actual voter turnout during Presidential elections between 1999 and 2023. The chart shows an inverse proportion as actual voter turnout keeps decreasing from 1999 to 2023 while the electoral budget increases from 1999 to 2023 in that order. In 1999, 58.9 million eligible citizens registered for the election, but only 52 million voters turned out to vote. In 2023, 69 million eligible voters registered while only 62.5 million came out to vote on election day. In 2007, 61 million registered, but 57 million came out to vote on election day. In 2011, 73 million citizens registered to vote, but only 53 million turned out to vote. In 2015, 67 million registered to vote, but only 43 million voters turned out to vote. In 2019, 83 million citizens registered to vote, but only 31 million voters eventually turned out on election day. In 2023, 93 million citizens registered to vote, but only 24.7 million voters turned out to vote.

Discussion

Interrogating the Voting Cost and the Voter Turnout

Table 1: Extrapolation of Electoral Cost, Voter Turnout, and Utilisation of Allocated Funds

ELECTION YEAR	TOTAL ELECTORAL BUDGET	TOTAL REGISTERED VOTERS	AMOUNT SPENT ON A SINGLE VOTER	ELIGIBLE VOTER TURNOUT	ELIGIBLE VOTERS THAT DID NOT TURN UP	AMOUNT SPENT ON VOTERS THAT TURNED OUT	AMOUNT WASTED ON VOTERS THAT DID NOT TURN OUT
1999	N1.5 billion	58.9 million	N25.4	30 million (50.9%)	28.9 million (49.1%)	N762 Million (50.8%)	N734 Million (49.2%)
2003	N29 Billion	62.5 million	N464.0	42 million (67.2%)	20.5 million (32.8%)	N19.5 billion (67.2%)	N9.5 billion (32.8%)
2007	N45.5 billion	61 million	N745.9	35 million (57.3%)	26 million (42.7%)	N26.1 billion (57.3%)	N19.3 billion (42.7%)
2011	N112 Billion	73 million	N1,534.2	39 million (53.4%)	34 million (46.6%)	N59.8 billion (53.3)	N52.2 billion (46.7%)
2015	N87.2 billion	67 million	N1,301.4	29 million (43.2%)	38 million (56.7%)	N37.8 billion (43.3%)	N49.3 billion (56.7%)
2019	N242 Billion	83 million	N2,915.6	28 million (33.7%)	55 million (66.3%)	N81.6 billion (33.7%)	N160.3 billion (66.3%)
2023	N355 Billion	93 million	N3,817.2	24 million (25.8%)	69 million (74.2%)	N91.8 billion (25.8%)	N263.3 billion (74.2%)

Source: Author's Analysis, 2025

Table 1 presents a breakdown of the electoral budget for all election years since 1999. In 1999, 1.5 billion naira were approved and allocated to INEC, with 58 million eligible voters registered to participate in the elections. However, only 30 million voters turned out to vote for the presidential candidates. N25.4 million was designated to cover the costs for each voter, but N734 million was wasted as 28.9 million voters did not turn out for the presidential elections.

In 2003, 28 billion naira were approved and allocated to INEC, where 62.5 million eligible voters registered to participate in the elections. However, only 42 million voters turned out to vote for the presidential candidates. N464 were voted to take care of an individual voter, but N9.5 billion was wasted because 20.5 million voters did not turnout for the presidential elections.

In 2007, 45.5 billion naira were approved and allocated to INEC, where 61 million eligible voters registered to participate in the elections. However, only 35 million voters turned out to vote for the presidential candidates. N745.9 were voted to take care of an individual voter, but N19.3 billion was wasted because 26 million voters did not turnout for the presidential elections.

In 2011, 112 billion naira was approved and allocated to INEC, where 73 million eligible voters registered to participate in the elections. However, only 39 million voters turned out to vote for the presidential candidates. N1,534.2 was allocated per individual voter, but N52.2 billion was wasted because 34 million voters did not turn out for the presidential elections.

In 2015, 87.2 billion naira were approved and allocated to INEC, where 67 million eligible voters registered to participate in the elections. However, only 29 million voters turned out to

vote for the presidential candidates. N1,301.4 was allocated per individual voter, but N49.3 billion was wasted because 38 million voters did not turn out for the presidential elections.

In 2019, 242 billion naira were approved and allocated to INEC, where 83 million eligible voters registered to participate in the elections. However, only 28 million voters turned out to vote for the presidential candidates. N2,915.6 were voted to take care of an individual voter, but N160.3 billion was wasted because 55 million voters did not turnout for the presidential elections.

In 2023, 355 billion naira was approved and allocated to INEC, where 93 million eligible voters registered to participate in the elections. However, only 24 million voters turned out to vote for the presidential candidates. N3,817.2 was allocated per individual voter, but N263.3 billion was wasted because 69 million voters did not turn out for the presidential elections.

Conclusion

Understanding electoral budgets is crucial for ensuring the effective management of electoral processes and promoting transparency and accountability. However, the democracy in Nigeria is nosediving into the drains. The turnout of voters continues to shrink while the electoral budget keeps surging above the bar. The confidence and trust of voters in the integrity of the Electoral process and the Electoral Management Body call for serious questioning. The national turnout was 29%, which had the lowest participation rate in the six decades of Nigeria's independence. Barely 9 million people voted for President Bola Ahmed Tinubu to govern 230 million Nigerians in 2023. Painfully, Nigeria has not spent as huge as it has spent to conduct the 2023 general election. A whopping sum of N355 billion was spent to bring on board the current administration.

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