
Implications of Government Spending on Election Materials and the Turnout of Electorate during the 2023 Presidential Poll for Economic Development

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Abstract

The 2023 Nigerian presidential election holds immense significance within the nation's political sphere, as it involves both the democratic selection of leadership and substantial government spending. This expenditure encompasses voter registration, ballot production, polling stations, and security measures. The increasing costs have strained the government's finances, raising concerns regarding their impact on citizen participation. The researchers employed descriptive and quantitative methods to analyse the 2023 presidential election data, focusing on how shifts in government election-related expenses influenced voter turnout and their potential effects on Nigeria's economic development. Despite significant election expenditures, the majority of respondents lacked confidence in the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and believed the election was predetermined. Various factors, including pre-voting smear campaigns, technical issues with card readers, a lack of political education, political violence, and insecurity, have contributed to voter apathy and low turnout. These issues can undermine economic development by fostering less accountable governance, inadequate policies, reduced investor confidence, potential instability, and limited inclusivity in development. The study underscores the urgent need for electoral reform and increased transparency in Nigeria's election process. Addressing voter confidence, campaign integrity, and technical challenges is vital for fostering greater citizen engagement and trust in the democratic system.

Keywords: Government Spending, Election Materials, Voter Turnout, Economic Development, 2023 Presidential Election

Introduction

The democratic system of government is widely believed to be one of the ultimate ideals that modern civilisation strives to create and sustain. This belief is not unconnected with the argument that democracy provides room for the popular will, extensive representation, and substantive citizens' participation and views that fit into the functioning of a fair and just society (Isiaka, Ibrahim & Kolawole, 2021). However, this

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is only achievable when citizens are ready to participate in the administration of the polity and the state creates an enabling environment for them to do so. Hence, for democracy to be viable, Dalton (1999), as cited in Faeren (2015), opined that citizens' involvement in the political process is essential. Without such involvement, democracy may be considered weak. Often, voting is one of the major ways in which citizens participate in the decision-making process in a democracy. The most crucial form of political participation is voting (Lee, 1980, cited in Isiaka *et al.*, 2021). Voting is a vital characteristic of any democracy and a blueprint for it to thrive, as well as an important element of a representative democracy. However, robust voter turnout goes a long way in determining the fairness, credibility, and legitimacy of a democratic government (Ambali, Isiaq & Isiaka, 2018).

Prior to the advent of representative democracy, citizens participated directly in governance without electing representatives. However, the impracticality of direct democracy in modern societies has paved the way for indirect democracy, making political apathy a concern for democracies worldwide. Arowolo & Aluko (2012), Agu, Okeke, & Idike (2013), and Fagunwa (2015), among other scholars, argued that most developing countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America experienced the most significant decline in political participation, especially during the electioneering process.

In his study, Cletus (2017) claims that while voter turnout in major African democracies has remained high, Nigerian democracy has underperformed. For instance, results from South African parliamentary elections indicate that in 2018, the country recorded a voter turnout of 65.99%, compared to 73.48% in 2014, 77.30% in 2009, 76.73% in 2004, and 89.28% in 1999. He further argued that voter turnout in Ghana has increased considerably since 2001. For instance, in 2012, 80.15% of the total registered voters participated, in comparison to 78.89% in 2020, 69.25% in 2016, 72.91% in 2008, and 85.12% in 2004. In Nigeria, although the number of registered voters has been increasing every election year—for example, the total number of registered voters was 57.9 million in 1999, 60.82 million in 2003, 67.57 million in 2007, 73.53 million in 2011, 58.83 million in 2015, and 84 million in 2019—voter turnout has been declining since the return to democracy in 1999. Comparatively, voter turnout was 52.3% in 1999, 69.1% in 2003, 57.5% in 2007, and 53.68%, 43.65%, and 34.75% in 2011, 2015, and 2019, respectively, according to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC, 2020). This is why Kuenzi & Lambright (2007) opined that voter turnout reduces with the number of elections held in some African states.

All around the world, holding elections is costly. The cost of holding elections varies depending on a number of factors and electoral occurrences, such as the population, size and composition of the democracy, and the frequency of elections. Thus, the average cost per registered voter index (COVI) is used globally to determine the adequacy of election funding. For established and stable democracies, the average cost per voter ranges from \$1 to \$3. In transitional democracies, it ranges from \$4 to \$8, while in post-conflict and transitional democracies, the cost is set at \$9 and above. Consequently, elections tend to be more expensive in nascent democratic countries. Nigeria witnessed another round of general elections on February 25, 2023. This was the seventh consecutive national poll held since the transition to the current constitutional democratic regime in 1999, which resulted in the seventh peaceful transfer of power between the two major political parties, the PDP and APC, in 1999, and the Labour Party,

which until recently, was not a major player (Group Africa Report, 2023). By and large, due to some alarming voter apathy in previous polls, the voting population was projected to be approximately 100 million. Due to the cost of logistics, highly secured ballot papers, and allowances for personnel, among other factors, and efforts to ensure a high level of voter turnout and credible elections, INEC's Electoral Act of 2022 promised Nigerians that the polls would feature innovations. These include the bimodal voter accreditation system (BVAS), which combines fingerprint and face biometrics to verify voters' identities, and the electronic transmission of results from polling units directly to the INEC Result Viewing Portal. Therefore, the sum of ₦305 billion was proposed as the budget for the exercise, and ₦105.25 billion was budgeted for the acquisition of the BVAS, which surpasses the estimated market cost by 30.4 percent (Isiaka, *et al.*, 2021 and *Vanguard*, 2022).

Following the COVI, INEC has estimated the cost per voter for the 2023 election at approximately \$5.39, targeting 100 million registered voters for the election. Using the N565 to \$1 parallel market exchange rate, the Commission quoted in its Election Project Plan (EPP) document, the actual figure amounted to N304.54 billion. However, the National Assembly ultimately pegged the figure at N305 billion, marking the highest budget the electoral body has ever received (Mahmood, 2022, and Business Day, 2023). Ondo State was among the 36 states of Nigeria where the presidential and parliamentary polls were held on February 25, while elections for state legislatures were held in 28 of the 36 states on March 11, 2023. Ondo State was among the other eight states that have different cycles due to lawsuits that cancelled elections or ousted individuals wrongfully sworn into office (Group Africa Report, 2023).

However, reports from national and international observers such as the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (I-IDEA), the Joint Electoral Observation Mission (JEOM), and news media including *Tell Magazine and Premium Times* (February 25, 2023) among others indicated that the voting behaviour of the people of Ondo State differed on the two election days, and Nigerians were mostly not impressed by the conduct of the 2023 presidential and national assembly elections (*Premium Times*, 2023). In fact, while commenting on the February 25, 2023, presidential and national assembly elections in the state, the governor of Ondo State, Arakunrin Oluwarotimi Akeredolu, lamented that the turnout was low compared to what was observed during the 2019 presidential and national assembly elections (*Premium Times*, 2023). Therefore, the objective of this paper is to assess the 2023 presidential poll in Ondo State vis-à-vis government spending on election materials and the turnout of the electorate during the 2023 presidential poll, as well as examine the implications for economic development.

Statement of the Problem

Anticipated as the largest electoral event in Nigerian history, the polls witnessed significant voter participation. INEC undertook over a year of registration drives, resulting in the enrollment of 12.29 million new voters by July 31, 2022. After thorough scrutiny, approximately 2.8 million ineligible registrants were identified and removed from the final voter register of 93.4 million, a notable increase from 84 million in the 2019 election. This surge in numbers poses new logistical challenges for the upcoming 2023 vote (*Sahara Reporters*, 2022). Voter turnout is a crucial indicator of democratic

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health, and this election is expected to witness higher engagement, particularly among young voters, many of whom will cast their ballots for the first time. INEC reports that out of the new registrants, 7.28 million, or 76 percent, are between the ages of 18 and 34, a significant rise from 51 percent in 2019. This spike in youth participation can be attributed to various factors, including political activism during the October 8, 2020, protests against police brutality, which gave the youth a sense of influence in driving governance improvements (Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, 2020). Obi, from the Labour Party, has garnered support from numerous young people, especially in the southern states, who seek to oust the two major parties they blame for the country's challenges (Obi, 2022). Furthermore, there is hope for an increased turnout in this election. Previous Nigerian elections witnessed declining participation, with voter turnout falling from 52.26 percent in 1999 to 69.08 percent in 2003, 43.65 percent in 2015, and 34.75 percent in 2019. However, several factors may lead to higher voter engagement by 2023. INEC's efforts to curb rigging in recent gubernatorial elections in certain states have bolstered public confidence in election credibility, resulting in increased trust that votes will be counted (Crisis Group interviews, 2022). More people, especially young people, are calling for improved governance as a result of the nation's economic downturn, which is marked by double-digit inflation, record unemployment, and unprecedented emigration combined with pervasive insecurity (*Vanguard*, 2022).

In the early hours of Wednesday, INEC announced the election results. Of the 93.47 million registered voters, only 24.9 million actually cast ballots, an 8.03 percent decline, despite the previously mentioned factors and significant federal government investment. This low turnout continues the trend of reduced voter participation observed in recent Nigerian elections. Furthermore, the turnout in the 2023 election fell significantly short of INEC's target of a 50 percent voter participation rate, prompting questions about why the 2023 general election experienced such a decline compared to previous elections in the country. Among the 36 states, only Adamawa and Jigawa recorded voter turnouts of up to 40 percent. Following closely were Plateau, Osun, and Gombe, with turnouts of 39.83 percent, 38.71 percent, and 33.87 percent, respectively. On the other hand, the states with the lowest voter turnout included Rivers, Bayelsa, Abia, Lagos, and Imo. Interestingly, Lagos and Abia were also among the states with the lowest turnout in the last two general elections (INEC Chart Dataphyte, 2023). Overall, the 2023 election witnessed a notable decrease in voter engagement, raising concerns about the underlying reasons for the lack of enthusiasm and participation among the electorate compared to previous electoral cycles.

In contrast to the 2015 and 2019 elections, where some states achieved voter turnouts of over 50 percent, the 2023 election did not see any state reaching such high levels of participation. Only the North-West and North-Central regions saw voter turnouts of up to 30% on a regional level; the North-East came in second with 28.63%. This marks a significant shift from the 2019 election, when the North-West and North-East regions had the highest voter turnout, each exceeding 40 percent. However, the three zones in southern Nigeria experienced less than a 25 percent voter turnout during the 2023 general election. Notably, the South-South region, which had the highest voter turnout in Southern Nigeria during the 2019 election, recorded the worst turnout in the 2023 election (*INEC, Chart Dataphyte 2023*). This discrepancy in voter turnout across different regions raises questions about whether government spending on election

materials is truly an effective strategy for promoting economic development. The low voter turnout in various regions suggests that there may be underlying issues affecting political participation and civic engagement, indicating that simply investing in election materials may not be sufficient to address these concerns and foster economic growth. To promote higher voter engagement and meaningful participation, the government must consider and address the root causes of declining voter turnout in different regions of the country. This may involve implementing measures to improve public trust in the electoral process, addressing socioeconomic disparities, and ensuring that citizens have equal access to information and opportunities for political involvement. Only by understanding and addressing these underlying issues can Nigeria achieve a more inclusive and vibrant democratic process that truly reflects the will of its people and contributes to economic development.

Several empirical studies have focused on different aspects of political participation, voter turnout, and election violence. Researchers such as Falade (2014), Sakah (2015), Cletus (2017), and Ambali *et al.* (2018) have delved into political participation and voter turnout. On the other hand, Saliku (2021), John (2019), Adeniyi, Onyia & Nmachi (2019), Shamsudeen (2015), Ikelegbe (2013), and Agoh (2017) have concentrated on election violence and its impact on turnout. However, few studies have investigated the relationship between government spending on election materials and voter turnout. Only a handful of researchers, such as Selb & Munzaert (2018); Blaise & Massicotte (2019); Kpessa-Boakye, Amankwah-Amoah, & Adomoka (2020); Kaminski & Kuersten-Hogan (2021); Stein (2019); and Akinbobola, Ogunrinola, & Ogunde (2021), have explored this area. What sets this study apart is its aim to bridge the gap in the existing literature. Apart from the variation in voter turnout measurement methods used by different scholars and countries, the authors of these studies have not fully explored the implications of government spending on election materials and voter turnout on economic development. This study addresses this gap by investigating the relationship between government spending on election materials and voter turnout and its potential impact on economic development. In doing so, it seeks to shed light on an essential aspect of the electoral process that has not been thoroughly examined in previous research. This could provide valuable insights into how investments in the electoral process can not only enhance democratic engagement but also stimulate broader socio-economic benefits.

Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to examine government spending on election materials and electoral turnout during the 2023 presidential poll and to examine its implications for economic development.

Theoretical Framework

Haywood (2002), as discussed in Isiaka's work in 202, presents Rational Choice Theory, which suggests that individuals make logical decisions based on available information and self-interest. In the context of electoral turnout, this theory implies that people weigh the costs and benefits of voting before making their decisions. Higher government spending on election materials can enhance perceived benefits and thereby boost voter

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turnout. The theory also identifies factors that influence turnout, including perceived political efficacy, a sense of civic duty, and social norms. Perceived political efficacy relates to one's belief in the importance of their vote; civic duty concerns citizens' responsibilities in the democratic process, and social norms involve societal expectations of electoral participation. Increased government spending can be seen as a signal of the election's importance, reinforcing civic duty and adherence to social norms, thereby increasing voter turnout. This study also explores the implications for economic development through Public Choice Theory, which posits that public officials and policymakers act in their self-interest. Government spending on election materials, if motivated by political advantages, may not necessarily promote economic development. However, if the spending aims to improve the electoral process and civic engagement, it can enhance economic development by fostering political stability and social cohesion.

Methodology

The study employed a descriptive research design to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena being studied. Primary data sources were gathered through direct participant observation and quantitative methods, using questionnaires to collect voters' opinions. The study population comprised all eligible Ondo voters aged 18 years and older, totaling 1,991,344 individuals. To determine the sample size, the Taro Yamane (1967) formula, as cited in the work of Isiaka et al. (2021), was used, resulting in a sample size of approximately 400. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed. Ondo State was divided into three senatorial districts, and the local government with the highest number of registered voters in each district was purposefully selected as the sample environment. These local governments were Owo for Ondo North, Akure South for Ondo Central, and Ilaje for the Ondo South Senatorial Districts. The sample size was calculated using Yamane's (1967) sample size determination formula.

$$n = N / (1 + N(e)^2)$$

Where:

n = signifies the sample size

N = the population under study

e = signifies the margin error (0.05)

$$n = 399.9 / (1 + 399.9 (0.05)^2)$$

$$n = 399.9 / (1 + 399.9 (0.0025))$$

$$n = 399.9 / (1 + 115)$$

$$n = 399.9 / 116$$

$$n = 396.55$$

$$n = 400$$

Thus, the sample size of the study was 400, which was shared among the three local governments. Owo local government for Ondo North had 133, Akure South for Ondo Central had 133 and Ilaje for Ondo South.

Table 1 - Summary of Voter turnout for Presidential Elections in Ondo State

A	Total Registered Voters	1,991,344
B	Total Accredited Voters	571,402
C	Total Vote Cast	570,017

D	Total Valid Votes	551,008
E	Rejected Votes	19,009
F	Percentage	28.62%

Source: INEC, 2023 General Elections. Percentages computed by the researchers.

Based on the data presented in Table 1, it is evident that the figures show a low turnout in presidential elections in the state. Governor Oluwarotimi Akeredolu's claim regarding low turnout in presidential elections appears to be supported by the data. Closed questionnaire that contained two sections (section A focuses on bio-data of the respondents, while section B covers questions on the 2023 Presidential poll in Ondo state and reasons voter apathy) were randomly administered to respondents 400 respondents in the three local government areas. Charts and tables were used to present the respondents' views on the work under study and a simple percentage was used in the analysis.

Presentation and Quantitative Analysis of Field Work Results

Four hundred (400) respondents were selected for this study and they answered and returned all 400 copies of the questionnaire. These respondents were drawn from the Owo, Akure South and Ilaje local governments and represented the three senatorial districts in the state. The composition of the respondents selected from these areas is presented.

Table 2: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Sex	Frequencies	Percentages
Male	223	56%
Female	177	44%
Total	400	100%

Table 2 shows that 56% (223) of the respondents were male and 44% (177) were female. This indicates that the male respondents outnumbered the female respondents. However, both sexes were present in the sample.

Table 3: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age Brackets	Frequency	Percentage
18-25	140	35%
26-35	92	23%
36-45	112	28%
45 and above	56	14%
Total	400	100%

Table 3 shows the age distribution of the respondents. It reveals that 35% (140) were between the ages of 18-25, 28% (112) were between the ages of 26-35, 23% (92) were between the ages of 36-45 and 14% (56) were aged 45 years and above.

Table 4: Educational Qualification of Respondents

Education	Frequencies	Percentages
No Former Education	Nil	0%
Primary school	Nil	0%

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Secondary school	96	24%
NCE and above	304	76%
Total	400	100%

Table 4 shows the educational attainment of respondents. It shows that 76% (304) of the respondents had an NCE and above, while the remaining 24% (96) had secondary education. This indicated that none of the respondents were illiterate.

Table 5: Occupational Affiliation of Respondents

Occupation	Frequency	Percentages
Students	140	35%
Artisans	52	13%
Civil servant	96	24%
Others	112	28%
Total	400	100%

Table 5 shows that 35% (140) of the respondents were students, whereas artisans represented 13% (52). Furthermore, 24% (96) were civil servants, while 28% (112) were engaged in other occupations such as interlacing.

Table 6: Local Government Affiliation of Respondents

Occupation	Frequencies	Percentages
Owo	196	49%
Akure	96	24%
Ilaje	108	27%
Total	400	100%

Table 6 shows respondents' local governments. This indicates that 49% (196) represented the Owo local government, which is the highest percentage, while 27% (108) were from Ilaje and 24% (96) were from the Akure local government.

Table 7: Reasons for Low Voter Turnout in 2023 Presidential poll in Nigeria

s/n	Reasons for voter apathy	SA	%	AG	%	UN	%	DI	%	SD	%	Resp	%
1	Pre-election day campaign	216	54	60	15	76	19	---	---	---	---	400	100
2	Rigorous voting procedure	136	34	200	50	24	6	40	10	---	---	400	100
3	Lack of confidence in political leaders	152	38	176	44	8	2	53	13	12	3	400	100
4	Political violence & insecurity	140	35	204	51	---	---	44	11	12	3	400	100
5	Votes will not count	112	28	172	43	16	4	84	21	16	4	400	100
6	No confidence in INEC	116	29	176	44	8	2	84	21	16	4	400	100
7	Inadequate political	124	31	196	49	12	3	60	15	8	2	400	100

education													
8	Prioritisation of election	108	27	208	52	8	2	64	16	12	3	400	100

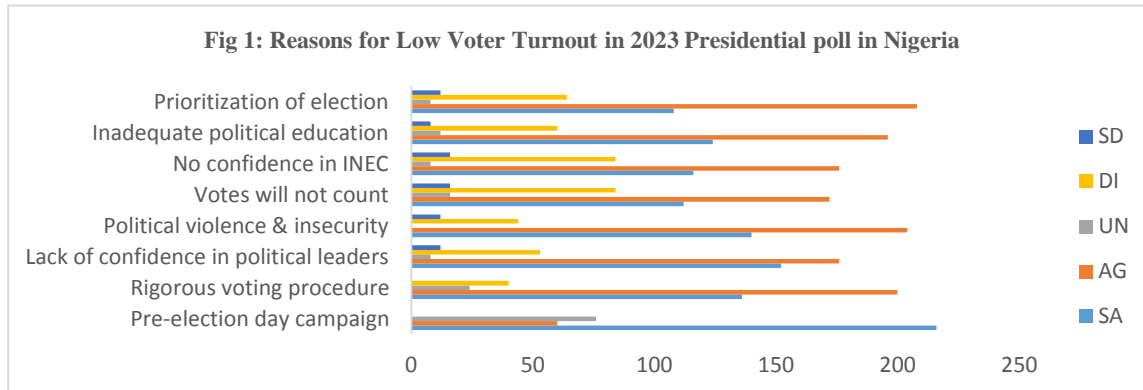


Table 7 and Fig. 1 indicate voter apathy in the 2023 presidential poll in Nigeria. Experiences from previous elections discouraged some people from coming out to vote in the just-concluded presidential election in Nigeria. According to this study, 54% (216) of the respondents strongly agreed that pre-election day campaigns by political parties and candidates created serious tension among voters, leading to low voter turnout. Additionally, 15% (60) of the respondents agreed with this view, while 19% (76) were undecided about whether pre-election day campaigns contributed to the low voter turnout in the 2023 presidential poll in Nigeria. Respondents also identified the stringent procedure that made voters stand in line for both voter registration and voting at the same time as a major contributing factor to the low general election turnout. A few polling locations within the sampled areas experienced card reader malfunctions, exacerbating the situation. For instance, 50% (200) of the respondents affirmed (agreed) that this was a key factor in low voter turnout, while 34% (136) strongly agreed. Meanwhile, 6% (24) of the respondents were undecided, and 10% (40) held a contrary opinion. Moreover, the lack of confidence in political leaders was also considered accountable for voter turnouts. Of the respondents, 44% (176) agreed and 38% (152) strongly agreed with this perspective, while 2% (8) were undecided and 13% (53) disagreed with the view that the lack of confidence in political leaders was a reason for voter apathy in the 2023 general election in Nigeria. In addition, low voter turnout in the general election of 2023 was acknowledged to be caused by a fear of political violence that was made worse by insecurity. Fifty-one percent (204) of the respondents agreed and 35% (140) strongly agreed that they did not vote because of political violence arising between hoodlums suspected to be political thugs and security personnel who attempted to hijack ballot papers and other electoral materials. In the Ute area of the Owo Local Government, reports indicate that thugs had moved earlier around some areas of the community to intimidate anyone who would not cast their ballot for their candidates (Business Day, 2023). However, 11% (44) disagreed and 3% (12) strongly disagreed with the opinion that political violence and insecurity contributed to the low turnout of the electorate in the 2023 general election in Nigeria.

The manner in which respondents expressed their opinions showed their increased confidence in INEC. However, the majority of the respondents still lacked confidence in

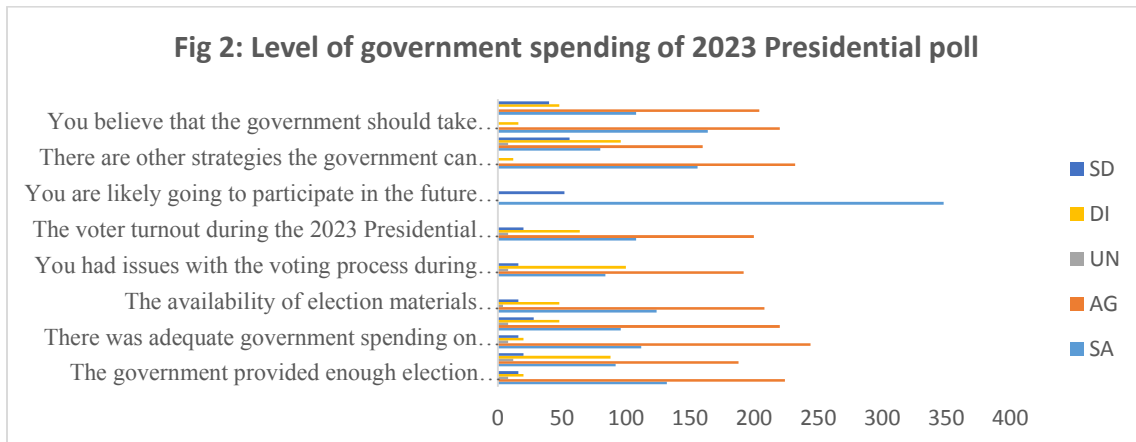
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INEC and believed that the outcome of the election was predetermined. Therefore, 43 % (172) of respondents agreed and 28% (112) strongly agreed) did not vote in the general election. Although, 4% (16) of the respondents were uncertain, 21% (84) disagreed, and 4% (16) strongly disagreed with the belief that their votes would not count. In addition, the lack of adequate political education from the electoral body, political parties, candidates, and civil society groups was responsible for the low voter turnout in the elections. Forty-nine percent (196) and 31% (124) of respondents supported this assertion (agreed and strongly agreed), 3% (12) were undecided and 15% (60) and 2% (8) disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively. Finally, when explaining why there was a low voter turnout during the presidential poll, many respondents mentioned that they attached more importance to the process. Fifty-two percent (208) agreed, 27% (108) strongly agreed and 2% (8) were undecided. Meanwhile, 16% (64) of the respondents disagreed and 3% (12) strongly disagreed with this opinion.

Table 8: Level of Government spending of 2023 Presidential Poll

s/n	Reasons for voter apathy	SA	%	AG	%	UN	%	DI	%	SD	%	Resp	%
1	The government provided enough election materials (Ballot papers, Ink, etc.) for the 2023 Presidential poll in Nigeria	132	33	224	56	8	2	20	5	16	4	400	100
2	You experienced challenges in accessing election materials on the day of the 2023 Presidential poll in Nigeria	92	23	188	47	12	3	88	22	20	5	400	100
3	There was adequate government spending on election materials during the 2023 Presidential poll in Nigeria	112	28	244	61	8	2	20	5	16	4	400	100
4	Increased government spending on election materials can lead to increased voter turnout in future elections in Nigeria	96	24	220	55	8	2	48	12	28	7	400	100
5	The availability of election materials influenced the turnout of electorates during the	124	31	208	52	4	1	48	12	16	4	400	100

	2023 Presidential poll in Nigeria												
6	You had issues with the voting process during the 2023 presidential poll in Nigeria.	84	21	192	48	8	2	100	25	16	4	400	100
7	The voter turnout during the 2023 Presidential poll in Nigeria will have implications on economic development in the country.	108	27	200	50	8	2	64	16	20	5	400	100
8	You are likely going to participate in the future elections in Nigeria	348	87	----	----	----	----	----	----	52	13	400	100
9	There are other strategies the government can adopt to improve voter turnout in Nigeria	156	39	232	58	----	----	12	3	----	----	400	100
10	You would not encourage the younger generation to participate in any future election in Nigeria	80	20	160	40	8	2	96	24	56	14	400	100
11	You believe that the government should take steps to encourage more people to participate in elections in Nigeria	164	41	220	55	----	----	16	4	---	----	400	100
12	There should be an increased budget for future electioneering in Nigeria.	108	27	204	51	----	----	48	12	40	10	400	100



Government spending on election materials for the 2023 general election has become a focal point, with the allocation of resources crucial for a fair electoral process. This analysis explores financial allocation and procurement processes, highlighting their potential impact on the integrity of the upcoming election. As shown in Table 8 and Fig. 2, 132 respondents, constituting approximately 33% of the sampled population, strongly agreed with the assertion that the government provided enough election materials (such as ballot papers and ink) for the 2023 presidential poll in Nigeria. Two hundred and twenty-four respondents, representing approximately 56% of the total, also agreed with this view, while eight respondents, accounting for 2%, were undecided. On the other hand, 20 and 16 respondents, constituting approximately 5% and 4%, respectively, disagreed and strongly disagreed with the opinion that the government provided enough election materials (ballot papers and ink) for the 2023 presidential poll in Nigeria.

Table 8 shows that 188 respondents, constituting 47% of the sampled population agreed that they experienced challenges in accessing election materials on the day of the 2023 presidential poll in Nigeria; ninety-two respondents (approximately 23% of the total) strongly agreed with this statement. On the other hand, 12 respondents (3%) were undecided, 88 (approximately 22%) disagreed and 20 (approximately 5%) strongly disagreed with the assertion that they experienced challenges in accessing election materials on the day of the 2023 presidential poll in Nigeria. Additionally, Table 8 established that 112 respondents, accounting for 28% of the sampled population, strongly agreed with the assertion that there was adequate government spending on election materials during the 2023 presidential poll in Nigeria. Two hundred and forty-four respondents, constituting approximately 61% of the total, also agreed with this view, while 8 respondents, representing 2%) were undecided. However, 20 and 16 respondents, accounting for approximately 5% and 4%, respectively, were of the opinion that government spending on election materials during the 2023 presidential poll in Nigeria was inadequate.

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Moreover, Table 8 also established that 108 respondents, constituting 27% of the sampled population, believed that voter turnout during the 2023 presidential poll in Nigeria would have implications for economic development. Additionally, 200 respondents (approximately 50 %) agreed with this view. Two percent (8) of the population were undecided, while 64 respondents (16 %) disagreed, and 20 respondents (5%) strongly disagreed. Likewise, table 8 shows that 348 respondents, accounting for 87% of the sampled population, asserted that they would participate in future elections in Nigeria, while 52 respondents (approximately 13%) strongly disagreed. Moreover, in Table 8, it was found that 156 respondents, accounting for 39% of the sampled population, strongly agreed that there are other strategies that the government can adopt to improve voter turnout in Nigeria. An additional 232 respondents, constituting approximately 58% of the total, also agreed, while only 12 respondents (approximately 3%) disagreed with the assertion that there are other strategies that the government can adopt to improve voter turnout in Nigeria. In addition, Table 8 indicates that 20% (80) of the respondents strongly agreed that they could not encourage the younger generation to participate in any future election in Nigeria, whereas 40% (160) of the sampled population also agreed. Eight of the respondents (2%) were undecided. In contrast, 96 respondents (approximately 24%) disagreed and 56 respondents (14%) strongly disagreed with the hypothesis. Lastly, regarding the sampled population in Table 8, 164 respondents, accounting for 41% of the sampled population, strongly agreed that the government should take steps to encourage more people to participate in elections in Nigeria, while 220 respondents (approximately 55 %) agreed. Only 16 respondents (approximately 4%) disagreed with this statement. Finally, in table 8, 108 respondents, representing 27% of the sampled population, strongly agreed that there should be an increase in the budget for future elections in Nigeria. Additionally, 204 respondents, accounting for 51%, agreed, while 48 people, making up approximately 12%, disagreed, and 40 respondents, about 10%, strongly disagreed with the statement.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study indicated that voter apathy led to low voter turnout in the 2023 presidential poll. This outcome aligns with the assertions made by Yakubu (2011) and Isiaka et al. (2021) that political apathy is a major factor contributing to the low voter turnout during the 2023 presidential poll in Nigeria. The statistics from INEC, presented in table 1 above, show that the percentage of voter turnout for the presidential poll in Ondo State was only approximately 29%, indicating a decline of about 11% from the 2019 election, which had a turnout of 40%. Additionally, this study revealed that a key factor contributing to low voter turnout in the general election was the rigorous procedure that required voters to be in the queue for both accreditation and voting simultaneously. Technical issues with card reader machines in certain polling places throughout the sampled areas made this worse. Furthermore, this finding showed that voters' lack of confidence in their political leaders has indeed led to voter apathy and, consequently, low voter turnout. This conclusion aligns with previous findings by Isiaka et al. (2021) and Falade (2014), indicating that trust in political institutions remains relatively low among the public.

Fear of political violence, combined with insecurity, constitutes an additional factor contributed to the low voter turnout among the electorate in the 2023 general election in Nigeria, as evidenced in this study. The prevalence of high levels of violence is a notable characteristic of the elections in Nigeria. Therefore, as suggested by Agu et al. (2013) and Amdi (2014) and cited in Isiaka et al (2021), it is clear that the low voter turnout and voter apathy in the 2023 presidential poll are attributable to both intra-party and inter-party violence and insecurity associated with the electoral process, which has created an atmosphere of fear among the electorate.

In addition to the lack of confidence in INEC, the voting procedures established by the electoral body and the absence of adequate political education also discouraged voters from participating in the 2023 presidential poll in Nigeria. Finally, the study reveals that voters prioritised the electoral process, which may account for the variation in voter turnout in the 2023 presidential poll compared to turnout during the gubernatorial election in 2020. This suggests that voters attached greater importance to gubernatorial elections, which influenced their decision to participate.

Based on the level of government spending on election materials for the 2023 general election, the findings showed that a majority of the electorate experienced challenges in accessing election materials on the day of the 2023 presidential poll in Nigeria. These challenges could have arisen from factors such as inadequate staff and technology, ongoing insecurity in some areas, logistics issues and typographical errors in the distribution lists. Furthermore, a significant number of respondents agreed that increased spending on election materials could potentially lead to increased voter turnout in future elections in Nigeria. The government spent #69 billion (US\$625 million) in the 2019 general election, registering 84 million voters, with a total turnout of 34.75%. In contrast, in the 2023 election, #305 billion (US\$762 million) was spent, with 100 million registered voters and a turnout of 26.76%. This turnout in 2023 was the lowest since the return to democracy in 1999, as reported by the INEC (2023). In general, a higher voters turnout has the potential to promote accountable governance, better economic policies, and inclusive development, which can, in turn, foster investment and social stability. However, the low voter turnout experienced in the 2023 Nigerian Presidential election

has the potential to undermine economic development by leading to less accountable governance, inadequate policies, reduced investor confidence, potential instability and limited inclusivity in development.

Finally, despite the challenges encountered in the 2023 general election, the electorate remains enthusiastic about participating in and encouraging the younger generation to actively engage in future elections in Nigeria. Findings from this study indicate that the highest number of respondents agreed that there should be an increase in the budget for future elections. This would enable the INEC to improve and develop new strategies that can motivate more people to participate in elections in Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study was carried out to determine government spending on election materials and electoral turnout during the 2023 presidential poll and as well, look at its implications for economic development. Despite the substantial financial resources allocated to the election process, the findings showed that voter apathy and low turnout can be attributed to a lack of trust in political leaders, negative campaigning by political stakeholders, technical difficulties with the BVAS, insufficient political education, political violence and concerns about safety and security. Thus, this study suggests the following recommendations.

1. To address the lack of trust in political leaders, there should be emphasis on transparency and accountability in the political process. Political leaders should take steps to rebuild an electorate's trust through responsible and ethical leadership.
2. Political stakeholders should engage in campaigns that focus on issues and policies rather than on negative campaigning, which can contribute to voter apathy. Encouraging constructive discourse can foster a more engaged electorate.
3. Addressing technical difficulties with the BVAS is crucial. Investments should be made to upgrade and maintain the technology to ensure smooth election processes
4. To combat the issue of insufficient political education, efforts should be made to educate citizens on the electoral process, their rights, and the importance of voting. This can be achieved through civic education Programmes and awareness campaigns. Additionally, they engage voters beyond the election cycle. Encourage participation in political and civic activities throughout the year, not just during elections, to maintain interest and involvement.
5. Measures should be taken to mitigate political violence and security should be enhanced to create a safe environment for voters. This included efforts to address issues related to electoral violence and insecurity.
6. Encourage inclusivity and diversity in political processes to ensure that all voices are heard and represented. This can be achieved through policies promoting diversity and inclusivity.
7. Governments should consider reallocating resources from election-related expenses to investments in economic development. This can have a positive impact on the overall well-being of the population, and may reduce the urgency of voter apathy.

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