ACADEMIC SCIENCE PRESS

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SOCIETY, CULTURE AND HUMAN SCIENCES
ISSN: 3143-6463

Insecurity and Voter Apathy in Nigeria: A Study of the 2015 and 2019 General Elections in Rivers State

Ndubuisi N. N [1]
[1] Department of Political Science, Federal University of Uyo, Nigeria
E-mail: nwekendubisi65@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
insecurity,
voter apathy,
electoral violence,
voter turnout,
electoral participation,
elections,
Rivers State.

Vol. 01, **No**. 05, 2026

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23185780

Copyright © 2026 by author(s) and Scientific Research Publishing Inc. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CCBY4.0).

http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/
Open Access

ABSTRACT

This study investigated insecurity and voter apathy in Nigeria, with specific reference to the 2015 and 2019 general elections in Rivers State. The study examined voters' responses to political rallies during the pre-election period, voters' assessment of election security, voters' responses to the voter registration exercise, and the effect of insecurity on the exercise of franchise and popular will in elections. A sample of 900 eligible voters in Rivers State was selected using stratified and random sampling techniques. The three senatorial districts, namely Rivers East, Rivers West, and Rivers Southeast, constituted the strata, from which three Local Government Areas were randomly selected. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics of frequency, percentage, and mean were used to answer the research questions, and two null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that there was a significant relationship between insecurity during political rallies and voters' withdrawal in the pre-election period in Rivers State. The data also confirmed that there was a significant relationship between election day violence and low voter turnout in the 2015 and 2019 general elections. Furthermore, there was a significant relationship between insecurity during voter registration and voter apathy in the State. The study concluded that insecurity significantly undermined electoral participation and deepened voter apathy in Rivers State during the period under review. It was recommended that INEC, in partnership with security agencies, should deploy technology driven voting systems and guarantee the safety of voters, INEC officials, and election materials to restore confidence in the electoral process.

Introduction

The basic prerequisite to democracy is the representation of the popular will of the people, as elections have long been seen as a necessary step toward democratic governance. Kuenzi and Lambright (2007) argue that because democracy, in its most fundamental sense, is rule by the people, the proportion of the citizenry expressing its preference through voting is of considerable interest. In Nigeria, however, political participation and voter apathy have remained recurring concerns since the return to democratic rule in 1999.

Voter apathy, particularly as reflected in the electorate's voting behaviour, has increased since 1999. Ibrahim et al. (2015) identified fear, insecurity, expectations, and economic conditions, among other factors, as determinants of voting behaviour in recent elections in Nigeria. Although the 1999 general election received widespread acceptance because Nigerians were tired of the overbearing nature of military rule, their expectations and political participation became increasingly dampened in subsequent years of the Fourth Republic.

It is an irrevocable truth that voters' confidence in the electioneering process emanates from a combination of the mechanisms and procedures deployed, in which the provision of security is paramount. Security-related issues are powerful enough to truncate the electioneering process of a country and cause disenchantment among voters, resulting in voter apathy and particularly low voter turnout. Voter turnout declined from 57.49% in 2007 to 53.68% in 2011, 43.65% in 2015, and 34.75%

in 2019 (Pulse Nigeria, 2019). This downward trend is significant because elections derive their democratic meaning from the participation of citizens in choosing their representatives. As Fagunwa (2016) argues, while high voter turnout contributes to the credibility of elections and the legitimacy of government, low turnout may reflect the preferences of only a relatively small proportion of the electorate. The implication is that elected leaders may emerge from a process in which a substantial proportion of eligible citizens have withdrawn from exercising their franchise.

The problem is especially relevant to Rivers State, given the state's history of electoral competition, political conflict, and insecurity. According to the Partnership Initiative in the Niger Delta Briefing (2015), Rivers State experienced an increased level of violence and insecurity from January 2015, while the 2015 general elections witnessed elevated levels of political conflict and tension. The situation persisted during the 2019 general elections, when several areas of the state experienced violence and the collation of governorship election results was reportedly suspended amid violence and alleged interference by the military (Niger Delta Watch, 2019).

Statement of Problem

Voting during elections is one of the political rights of eligible voters. On the other hand, provision of security is also one of the functions of government as machinery of the state. Many have lost their lives for relying on this primary function of government. For example, shooting in Okoroagu, Etche during the 2015 gubernatorial election, the killing of a lecturer of Ken Saro Wiwa polytechnic, Bori, in the 2019 general elections, etc. are some of the practical challenges that provoked the conduct of this study. In recent times and for the reason that all-inclusive government as opposed to military is now preferred among comity of nations, the people's choice holds way in almost every policy decision making. Those governing and the governed need security in various facets it can be conceptualized. There is need for social security, economic security and political security; and if the people must participate in political affairs that affect them, then political security becomes paramount but otherwise they withdraw to their shells. Elections in Rivers State have posed threats to Nigeria's nascent democracy, as insecurity has questioned the legitimacy of government and the integrity of the election.

Since 2015, Nigeria's democracy, elections, and its emerging leadership have lost credibility and legitimacy. Situations where less than 50 percent of the registered voters decide the fate of the nation simply because the people feel insecure whenever they try to exercise their franchise. From 2007, Nigeria's voters' turnout has plummeted from 57.49% to 34.75% of registered voters in 2019. Political gladiators seized this scenario to recycle themselves in government as in Rivers State which experienced the country's highest level of violence during the 2015 gubernatorial elections, resulting in the death of political party rivals, hired security agents and police officers (Niger Delta Partnership Initiative Briefing, 2015).

Apprehension continues to heighten in Rivers State to which the scale of insecurity during campaigns rallies, voter registration exercise, and election proper have challenged the present study to really assess the security situation in Rivers State especially during 2015 and 2019 general elections.

Conceptual Clarifications

Insecurity is a broad concept which generally connotes the absence of protection, safety, certainty or anything to fall back on in a threatening situation. It is a condition that affects human existence and has more meaning to human beings because of the value attached to human life, comfort and survival. Adebanjoko and Ugwuoke in Tella (2015) conceptualise insecurity as threats, whether physical or latent, which may generate fear and compel individuals or states to seek means of protection. In this regard,

insecurity can be understood as a condition of fear, anxiety, or uncertainty arising from actual or perceived threats to the economic, social and political existence of individuals or groups. The manifestations of insecurity in Nigeria have assumed different forms, including terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, militancy, communal conflicts, armed robbery, and other violent crimes. Achumba, Ighomereho and Akpor-Robaro (2013) identify remote and immediate factors of insecurity. The remote factors include ethno-religious conflicts, social inequality, institutional failure, weak security and conflicts between government and the public, while immediate factors include unemployment, hunger, terrorism and other irresponsible activities.

Voter Apathy

Amanyie, Bariledum and Lucky (2015) describe apathy as a mental state in which an individual does not care much about something and shows little passion, emotion or excitement toward sit. In the political context, Crewe, Fox and Alt (1992) associate apathy with passivity, indifference and the absence of a feeling of personal responsibility towards political affairs. Yakubu (2012) similarly defines voter apathy as the indifference of electorates towards electoral processes, particularly voting. Voter apathy is therefore concerned with the decline or refusal of eligible voters to express their political choice through elections. It may be reflected in low voter turnout, failure to register, refusal to collect Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs), reluctance to attend political campaigns or unwillingness to participate in voting. Cloud specifically associates voter apathy with situations where eligible voters fail to vote in public elections.

Election

Election is a fundamental component of democratic government because it provides the institutional mechanism through which citizens select their political representatives. Nwolise (2007) defines election as the process of selecting officials or representatives of an organization or group through the votes of qualified members. Benjamin (2009) similarly views election as a procedure through which members of an organization or community choose representatives who occupy positions of authority. Mediayanose (2018) consider selection as the process through which eligible citizens choose political representatives expected to address collective problems on their behalf. According to Iyayi (2005), elections provide a medium through which competing interests can resolve their claims to political power peacefully. Elections also contribute to political legitimacy, leadership succession and democratic accountability. Consequently, where elections are characterized by violence, intimidation, vote buying, rigging and other irregularities, their capacity to perform these democratic functions is weakened.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on Protection Motivation Theory. Protection Motivation Theory was propounded by Rogers (1975) and subsequently revised in 1983. The theory explains how individuals respond to perceived threats through two cognitive processes: threat appraisal and coping appraisal. Threat appraisal concerns the perceived severity of a threat and an individual's susceptibility to it, while coping appraisal relates to the perceived effectiveness of the response and the individual's ability to perform it (Rogers, 1975, 1983; Maddux & Rogers, 1983). Thus, individuals who perceive a threat as severe and themselves as vulnerable are more likely to adopt behaviours aimed at reducing their exposure to such threat (Crossler, 2009). The electoral experience in Rivers State provides an indication of this pattern. Registered voters increased from 2,537,590 in 2015 to 3,215,273 in 2019, while the number that voted declined from 1,172,535 to 1,123,840 (INEC, 2019).

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design to examine voter apathy and insecurity in relation to the 2015 and 2019 general elections in Rivers State, Nigeria. The study was also historical in orientation, drawing on respondents' experiences of the two elections. Rivers State comprises 23 Local Government Areas (LGAs) and is located in the coastal Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The study population comprised 3,215,273 registered voters in Rivers State, based on the 2019 Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) records.

A sample of 900 voters was selected using stratified random sampling across the three senatorial districts of the state. The districts served as the primary strata, from which three LGAs were selected in each district, with 100 respondents drawn from each selected LGA. The selected LGAs were Ahoada East, Degema, Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni, Eleme, Oyigbo, Opobo/Nkoro, Etche, Okrika and Obio/Akpor. Respondents comprised youths aged 18–35 years, adults aged 36–55 years, and older adults aged 56 years and above.

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled "Insecurity and Voter Apathy" (IVA). A total of 946 questionnaires were administered to the respondents; however, only 900 were returned and used in the analysis. The instrument was subjected to face and content validation. Reliability was established using the test– retest method. The two sets of scores were correlated using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient, producing a reliability coefficient of 0.81, as was obtained from the test-retest procedure while indicating satisfactory consistency. Data were analysed using frequency counts and percentages to address the research questions, while t-test statistics were employed to test the study hypotheses.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequency and percentages were used to summarise respondents' views on pre-election activities, election-related insecurity, voter registration, and electoral apathy. The study hypotheses were tested using the one-sample *t*-test at the 0.05 level of significance. The results are presented in tables and interpreted in relation to the study objectives and hypotheses.

Table 1:Voters' responses to political rallies during the pre-election period.

S/N	Voters' responses	Yes Response (%)	No Response (%)	Decision
1	Did you attend campaign rallies for the 2015 general elections?	630 (70.0%)	270 (30.0%)	Accept
2	Did you attend campaign rallies for the 2019 general elections?	60 (6.9%)	840 (93.3%)	Reject
3	Did you get registered as a member of a political party in 2015?	775 (86.1%)	125 (13.9)	Accept
4	Did you get registered as a member of a political party in 2019?	530 (58.9%)	370 (41.1%)	Accept
5	Did you follow up preferred broadcast of campaign for 2015 general elections?	840 (93.3%)	60 (6.7%)	Accept
6	Did you follow up on the preferred broadcast of campaign for 2019 general elections?	846 (94.0%)	54 (6.0%)	Accept
7	Did you lose confidence in 2015 elections due to insecurity?	546 (60.7%)	354 (39.3%)	Accept
8	Did you lose confidence in 2019 elections due to insecurity?	850 (94.4%).	50 (5.6%)	Accept

Table 1 shows substantial participation in the 2015 pre-election activities. Seventy percent of respondents attended campaign rallies, while 86.1% reported political party registration. Participation in campaign rallies declined markedly in 2019, with only 6.7% attending. However, exposure to campaign broadcasts remained high in both elections (93.3% in 2015 and 94.0% in 2019). Perceived insecurity also affected electoral confidence, rising from 60.7% in 2015 to 94.4% in 2019.

Table 2:Voters'Assessment of Insecurity during elections in Rivers State.

S/N	Voters' assessment	Yes Response (%)	No Response (%)	Decision
9	Did you witness/hear any killing in the 2015 general elections	853 (94.8%)	47 (5.2%)	Accept
10	Did you witness/hear any recorded killing in the 2019 general elections	855 (95.0%)	45 (5.0%)	Accept
11	Did you witness/observe Safe polling units during the 2015 general elections	320 (35.6%)	580 (64.4%)	Reject
12	Did you witness/observe safe polling units during the 2019 general elections	80 (8.9%)	820 (91.1%)	Reject
13	Political parties did not demonstrate acts of insecurity in 2015 elections	818 (90.9%)	82 (9.1%)	Accept
14	Political parties did not demonstrate acts of insecurity in 2019 elections	828 (92.0%)	72 (8.0%)	Accept
15	You did not observe absence of security personnel in polling units in 2015 elections	70 (7.8%)	830 (92.2%)	Reject
16	You did not observe absence of security personnel in polling units in 2019 elections	60 (6.7%)	840 (93.3%)	Reject

Table 2 indicates a high perception of electoral insecurity in both elections. Approximately 94.8% and 95.0% of respondents reported witnessing or hearing of killings during the 2015 and 2019 elections, respectively. Perceptions of safe polling units declined from 35.6% in 2015 to 8.9% in 2019. The findings therefore suggest heightened perceptions of electoral insecurity in 2019.

Table3: Voters' Registration Exercises in Rivers State.

S/N	Voters' responses	Yes Response (%)	No Response	Decision
17	Did you get registered before the 2015 general election?	847 (94.1%)	53 (5.9%)	Accept
18	Did you get registered before the 2019 general election?	860 (95.6%)	40 (4.4%)	Accept
19	Did you observe that registration centres were adequate and well spread for the 2015 general elections?	58 (6.4%)	842 (93.6%)	Reject
20	Did you observe that registration centres were adequate and well spread for the 2019 general elections?	48 (5.3%)	852 (96.7%)	Reject
21	Did you observe that materials for registration were not in their optimum condition in 2015	53 (5.9%)	847 (94.1%)	Reject
22	Did you observe that materials for registration were not at their optimum performance in 2019	41 (4.6%)	859 (95.4%)	Reject
23	Did you feel that the timeline for registration of voters in 2015 was adequate	52 (5.8%)	848 (94.2%)	Reject
24	Did you feel that the timeline for registration of voters in 2019 was adequate	73 (8.1%)	827 (91.9%)	Reject

Table 3 shows high levels of voter registration, with 94.1% of respondents registered before the 2015 election and 95.6% before the 2019 election. However, respondents reported inadequacies in the distribution of registration centres, registration materials, and the time allocated for registration in both electoral periods.

Table 4 Voters' Franchise and Popular Will

S/N	Voters' franchise/popular will and apathy in elections	Yes Response (%)	No Response (%)	Decision
25	Did the results of the 2015 elections indicate apathy?	578 (64.2%)	322 (35.8%)	Accept
26	Results of 2019 elections indicate apathy?	839 (93.2%)	61 (6.8%)	Accept
27	Did your ward election results in 2015 indicate apathy?	574 (63.8%)	326 (36.2%)	Accept
28	Did your ward election results in 2019 indicate apathy?	347 (38.6%)	553 (61.4%)	Reject
29	Did your LGA election results in 2015 indicate apathy?	585 (65.0%)	315 (35.0%)	Accept
30	Did your LGA election results in 2019 indicate apathy?	296 (32.9%)	604 (67.1%)	Reject
31	Did you actually come out to vote in 2015 elections	818 (90.9%)	82 (9.1%)	Accept
32	Did you actually come out to vote in 2019 elections	341 (37.9)	559 (62.1%)	Reject

Table 4 indicates increased perceptions of electoral apathy in 2019. While 90.9% of respondents reported voting in 2015, only 37.9% reported voting in 2019, representing a substantial decline in reported voter participation. Similarly, 93.2% associated the 2019 election results with voter apathy, compared with 64.2% for 2015.

Table 5:Hypotheses Interpretation

Variables	Calculated t	Df	(α)	*p*-value	Decision
Pre-Election Activity	168.88	899	0.05	<.001	RejectH_0
Voter Turnout	152.05	899	0.05	<.001	RejectH_0

Computed by the Researcher

The one-sample *t*-test results show that the mean scores for pre-election activities (t (899) = 168.88, p <.001) and voter turnout (t (899) = 152.05, p <.001) differed significantly from their respective test values. Consequently, the null hypotheses were rejected at the 0.05 significance level.

Discussion of Findings

The findings established that voters' responses to pre-election activities significantly affected election outcomes in Rivers State. Although voters-maintained interest through political party registration and following campaign broadcasts, participation in campaign rallies declined markedly in 2019, suggesting that insecurity and an unfavourable political environment discouraged direct political participation. This finding agrees with Olurode, & Hammanga, (2013) who linked electoral violence and insecurity with reduced citizen participation, and Suleetal. (2017), who identified prevailing socio-political conditions as important influences on political participation in Nigeria.

The study also revealed a high level of perceived electoral insecurity in both 2015 and 2019, particularly through reported killings and unsafe polling units, despite the presence of security personnel. This indicates that the deployment of security personnel did not necessarily guarantee a secure voting environment. The finding is consistent with Egobueze and Nweke (2015), who identified political youths

and thuggery as threats to electoral security in Rivers State, just as Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (2016), which associated political rivalry with electoral insecurity.

Voter registration was relatively high in both elections, demonstrating voters' willingness to participate in the electoral process. However, inadequate registration centres, technical problems with registration materials, and insufficient registration timelines constituted major challenges. This finding supports Jegaetal. (2014), who identified technological and logistical difficulties associated with voter registration in Nigeria.

The study further found evidence of voter apathy, particularly in 2019, reflected in declining turnout and perceptions that electoral outcomes did not adequately represent popular will.

Conclusion

The study concluded that electoral insecurity significantly influenced voter participation, confidence, and perceptions of electoral outcomes in Rivers State during the 2015 and 2019 general elections. The data also confirmed that voter registration and interest in political information remained relatively high, as insecurity was associated with reduced participation in campaign rallies an declining voter turnout, particularly in 2019. The findings thereby indicated that the presence of security personnel did not necessarily guarantee safe polling environments, while weaknesses in electoral logistics and perceptions of electoral irregularities contributed to voter apathy and concerns about the credibility of election outcomes.

Recommendations

The study therefore recommends the following:

i. There should be adequate security, crowed management, electronic campaign and monitoring of electoral personnel, and materials during pre-election period.
ii. INEC and other election stakeholders should intensify security, voter education, civic engagement, and confidence-building initiatives through traditional and digital media
iii. Electoral authorities should improve the accessibility and efficiency of voter registration by expanding registration centres, strengthening registration technology, and ensuring adequate registration timelines.
iv. Political parties should promote peaceful campaigns and discourage violence, intimidation, and the use of political thugs to enhance voter participation and electoral credibility.

References

1. Achumba, I. C., Ighomerrho, O. S., & Akpor Robaro, M. D. M. (2013). Security challenges in Nigeria and the implications for business activities and sustainable development. *Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development*, *4*(2),79–99.

2. Amanyie, N. S., Kia, B. & Nwibor, B. L. (2015). Electoral violence and political apathy in Nigeria: Issues and challenges. *British Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, 13*(1), 155-173.

3. Benjamin, G. (2009). *Election*. Microsoft@Encarta (c) 1993-2008 Microsoft Corporation.

4. Cloud, D. (2010). Voter Apathy: Definition, Statistics and Causes. *Mediterrenean Journal of Social Sciences.* 3, (5), Italy, MCSER Publishing.

5. Crewe, I. Fox, T. & Alt, J. (1992). Non-voting in British general elections, 1966-October 1974. *In Issues and Controversies in British electoral behaviour.* Harvester Wheatsheaf.

6. Crossler, R. E. (2009). *Protection motivation theory: Understanding the determinants of individual security behaviou*r. Unpublished Doctorate Dissertation, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

7. Egobueze, A., & Nweke, K. (2015). Youth violence and 2015 general elections in Nigeria: The Rivers State experience. *Research Gate*.

8. Fagunwa, T. C. (2016). *Voter apathy and Nigeria's electioneering process: Asynopsis on the2015 general elections.* Independent National Electoral Commission. https://www.inec.gov.ng

9. Ibrahim, S. G., Liman, A. N., & Mato, K. (2015). The 2015 general elections: A review of major determinants of paradigm shift in voting behaviour and political participation in Nigeria. *International Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Studies,2*(9),8–16.

10. Independent National Electoral Commission INEC, (2019). *Operation Info-Kitfor2019 general elections*. 16th February/2nd march 2019.

11. Iyayi, F. (2005). Elections and electoral practices in Nigeria: Dynamics and implications. *The Constitution, 5*(2), 18–31.

12. Jega, A. M., Nwankwo, C., & Dowrie, R. (2014). *Nigeria's 2015 elections: Expectations, priorities and the Independent National Electoral Commission*. Chatham House.

13. Kuenzi, M., & Lambright, G. M. S. (2007). Voter turnout in Africa's multi party regimes. *Comparative Political Studies, 40*(6), 665–690.

14. Maddux, J. E. & Rogers, R. W (1983). Protection motivation and self-efficiency: A revised theory of fear appeals and attitude change. *Journal of Experimental social Psychology (*Vol.19, pp. 469-479).

15. Mediayanose, O. E. (2018). The role of security in credible elections and sustenance of democracy in Nigeria. *Journal of Public Administration, Finance and Law, 13*,134–142.

16. Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room (2019). *Niger delta watch 2019.* http//situation room. Plac.org

17. Nwolise, O. B. C. (2007). Electoral violence and Nigeria's 2007 elections. *Journal of African Elections, 6*(2), 74–86.

18. Olurode,L., & Hammanga, M. K. (2013). Deployment of security personnel in election: Challenges and lessons from the field. InL.Olurode (Ed.), *Election security in Nigeria: Matters arising* (pp.63–85). Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

19. Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta (2015). Conflict prevention in Rivers State in the after math of election violence. *Niger Delta Partnership Initiative.* http://www.p4p-nigerdelta.org

20. Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre. (2016). *Election security threat assessment: Towards the 2016 rerun election in Rivers State, Nigeria*. Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre.

21. Pulse Nigeria Online News Platform. (2019). *2019 election: Only 34.75% registered voters voted*. Pulse Nigeria.

22. Rogers, R. W. (1975). Cognitive and physiological processes in fear based attitude change: A revised theory of protection motivation.

23. In J. Carcioppo & R. Petty (Eds), *Social psycho physiology: A Source book* (pp.153-176). Guilford Press.

24. Sule, B. , Sani, M. A. M., & Mat, B. (2017). Political behaviour and voting pattern in Nigeria: A study of the 2015 presidential election. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education, Arts and Sciences,4*(4),1–13.

25. Tella, C. M. (2015). Insecurity in Northern Nigeria: Causes, consequences and resolutions. *International Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies, 2*(4), 23–36.

26. Yakubu, Y. A. (2012). Democracy and political apathy in Nigeria (1999–2011). *European Scientific Journal, 8* (20), 38–48.