

## Voters Participation in the Nigeria Electoral System: A Study of Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

Joy U. Egwu

Department of Political Science Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities Ebonyi State University Abakaliki.

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### ABSTRACT

Electoral process is achieved through voters' participation. Regrettably, voters have been denied participation in Nigeria's elections ranging from omission of their names in the voters register to denial by activities and many other factors. This paper is on electoral process and voter's participation in Nigeria. The paper adopted the procedural theory of democracy. The study adopted descriptive design and made use of probability sampling technique as well as Taro Yamani formula to determine the sample size of the respondents from the general population. The study also used both the primary and secondary methods of data collection which include questionnaire. In its method of analysis, simple percentage and chi-square statistical tool were used for test of hypotheses. The findings of the paper showed that omissions of voters names had negative effects on the participation of electorates in 2015 Nigeria elections. The paper further established that poor access to polling units hindered voters' participation in elections. More so, hoarding of electoral materials had negative effect on the outcome of Nigeria's 2015 elections. This paper however recommended that INEC needs to improve on the area of voters electoral security. Political parties should be encouraged to improve on their public images. INEC can also encourage increased political participation by improving on its use of the election technology of smart card readers in future elections to minimize the delays that were witnessed during the 2015 elections due to technical hitches. There is the need for mass political education and enlightenment in Nigeria.

Keywords: Electoral process, Voters participation, Elections, Nigeria.

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### INTRODUCTION

A culture of elections that are marked by violence and warfare is totally an anathema to the possibilities of development [1,2,3]. But have we always had elections this way? The elections so far held in Nigeria can be categorized into five different phases: 1. Elections in the colonial period (1922- 1959); 2. Elections in the early years of independence (1960-1965); 3. Elections during the years of military rule; 4. Elections under civilian regimes in-between the years of military rule; and 5. Elections during civilian to civilian transition (1999 to-date) [4,5,6,7]. A number of elections were held in Nigeria in the colonial period. These elections began with the legislative councils in Lagos and Calabar from 1922 [8,9], the first set being the elections in Lagos and Calabar in September 1923 after the introduction of Sir. Hugh Clifford Constitution in 1922 [10]. The growth of the labour movement and the development of towns led to concessions by colonial authorities that

culminated in city and legislative council elections [11,12]. By 1938, for example, the Nigerian Youth Movement, an organization that was hostile to British colonial interests in Lagos in particular and Nigeria in general was able to win three out of the four available seats in the city council elections. In the same year, it also won all three legislative seats in the legislative council elections. Several other elections took place between 1951 and 1959 [13]. While the 1951 Regional Legislative elections took place under the Macpherson constitution of the same year, the 1954 elections took place under the new Federal Constitution. Whereas all constitutions up to 1954 limited the right of elections to certain members of the population, universal adult suffrage was adopted in 1958, and took effect in 1959. However, women in northern Nigeria were legally disqualified from voting until 1977, when an electoral decree granted them suffrage. The December 12, 1959

general elections into Local Councils, Regional and Federal Legislatures ushered in Nigeria's political independence in 1960 [14]. The most notable feature of that year's election was the entrenchment of tri-regional party system reflecting the dominant ethnic groups in each region - Northern People's Congress (NPC) for Northern Nigeria; Action Group (AG) for Western Nigeria and National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons (NCNC) for Eastern Nigeria, and the emergence of three prominent Political leaders for the three-dominant regional and ethnic based political parties: (Sir Ahmadu Bello-NPC, Dr. NnamdiAzikiwe-NCNC and Chief ObafemiAwolowo-AG). Other sets of elections in post-independence Nigeria (1960-65) were marked by crises resulting from the disputed census figures released in March 1961. The 1964 general elections which were marked by boycotts in the East, Midwest, Lagos and parts of the Western Region, political violence, physical intimidation of opposition politicians and their campaigners, procedural violations, disagreements from alliances forged between the dominant parties and some minority parties in the regions, and the tension that followed the October 1965 elections into the Regional Government of the West. For example, the October 1965 elections into the Regional Government of the West were no less farcical because although the people clearly rejected the Akintola government at the polls and voted massively for the AG opposition party, 'the Akintola government publicly (interfered) with the results of the elections. In very many cases, AG candidates who held certificates that they were duly elected in their constituencies later heard their names mentioned as defeated candidates through governmental news media" [15]. These developments, including the simmering TIV revolt in the Middle Belt, the political impasse at the centre, the resulting mass revolt in the Western Region by the people who felt rightly that they had been cheated at the polls set the stage for the first military coup of January 15, 1966-These developments, among others, set the stage first military coup of January 15, 1966, which led to the assassination of some prominent politicians of the first

republic. The military rulers conducted three elections during their period of misrule. These were:(i) The elections of 1979, under the first coming of Obasanjo. (ii) The 1992-1993 elections under General Babangida and which were annulled; and (iii) The 1999 elections under General Abdusalami Abubakar.

From 1983, three sets of elections were conducted under the civilian regimes. These were: (i) the general elections of 1983 under the AlhajiShehuShagari NPN government (ii) the general elections of 2003 and 2007 under Chief Olusegun Obasanjo and (iii) the 2011 and 2015 general elections under Dr. GoodluckEbele Jonathan. Commenting on these elections, especially on the first and the last, the EU Election Group, which monitored the 2003 elections suggested that, 'the most free, fair and peacefully conducted elections in Nigeria were those in 1959 1979, 1993 and 1999, and the most chaotic, violent and disputed were those in 1964 and 1983. The reason for this is that the first three were 'transition' elections in which the regimes in power and responsible for organizing the elections had to hand over power to a democratic civilian regime. The 2015 elections were unique because parties chose to seek redress in courts and electoral panels rather than take laws into their hands. Indeed, President Goodluck Jonathan conceded defeat and handed over to the government of President Muhammadu Buhari. Election is an integral part of a democratic process that enables the citizenry determine fairly and freely who should lead them at every level of government periodically and take decisions that shape their socio-economic and political destiny; and in case they falter, still possess the power to recall them or vote them out in the next election. This author [12] aptly defined election thus: Election is a major instrument for the recruitment of political leadership in democratic societies; the key to participation in a democracy; and the way of giving consent to government [11]; and allowing the governed to choose and pass judgment on office holders who theoretically represent the governed [12]. In its strictest sense, there can never be a democracy without election. Huntington is however quick to point

out that, a political system is democratic 'to the extent that its most powerful collective decision-makers are selected through fair, honest and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes, and in which virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote' [8]. In its proper sense, election is a process of selecting the officers or representatives of an organization or group by the vote of its qualified members [10]. [3], defined elections as the process of elite selection by the mass of the population "in any given political system" [5]. Elections provide the medium by which the different interest groups within the bourgeois nation state can stake and resolve their claims to power through peaceful means [6]. Elections therefore determine the rightful way of ensuring that responsible leaders take over the mantle of power. An election itself is a procedure by which the electorate, or part of it, choose the people who hold public office and exercise some degree of control over the elected officials. It is the process by which the people select and control their representatives. The implication of this is that without election, there can be no representative government. This assertion is, to a large extent, correct as an election is, probably, the most reliable means through which both the government and representatives can be made responsible to the people who elect them. [8], However, sees election as the selection of a person or persons for office as by ballot and making choice as between alternatives. [10] defined election in a more encompassing and comprehensive definition of election when he noted that the term connotes the procedure through which qualified adult voters elect their politically preferred representatives to parliament or legislature of a county (or any other public positions) for the purpose of forming and running the government of the country. Thus [12] elucidates what the basic objective of election is which is to select the official decision makers who are supposed to represent citizens-interests. Elections, according to him extend and enhance the amount of popular participation in the political system. However, elections in Nigeria have always been hindered by some set back starting from poor election

participation. Nigeria's 2011 and 2015 general elections is the comparative study of this paper to know the level of growth of Nigeria's democracy. The 2011 general elections held in April 2011; national assembly election on the 9<sup>th</sup> April, presidential on the 16<sup>th</sup> April, while governorship and state houses of Assemble election were conducted on the 26<sup>th</sup> April 2011. By the time of the 2011 general elections 63 political parties were registered for the elections [11]. The 2015 general elections were scheduled for the 14<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> February 2015 respectively and later were changed to 28<sup>th</sup> March and 11 April 2015 respectively. All 36 states held presidential, national assembly state Houses of Assembly elections. Gubernatorial polls were held in 29 states. March 28<sup>th</sup> and April 1<sup>st</sup> 2016 elections marked another turn in Nigeria's democratic history as registered voters took to the polls to elect the next set of leaders into the Presidential and National Assembly positions. The elections, conducted in the thirty six states of the country and the Federal Capital Territory, witnessed the emergence of the opposition party, the All Progressives Congress (APC) and its presidential candidate. This outcome was also the first time an opposition party would unseat the ruling party, People Democratic Party (PDP) since Nigeria's transition into civil rule in 1999. Voter's participation is the process whereby the citizens of the country go and vote the leaders of their choice. It is a generally accepted notion that democracy as far as legitimacy is concerned is a game of numbers. Thus from this point of view, it can be decided that it is only right when a government records majority backing through elections. This majority backing must as a matter of fact commensurate with the increasing total population of the electorate in the country because is the sine qua non for the growth of democracy. Political participation, which has attracted considerable academic interests [1,4,6,8] is one of the oldest concepts in the comparative study of politics. [9], define voter turnout as one of the core ways of measuring the level of participation in any election. Voter's turnout is usually measured as a percentage of registered voters who vote. The assumption is that the higher

the level of voter turnout, the higher the level of participation and by extension, the greater the democratic quality of the election [10]. Electoral process thus is the step by step process in the conduct of election. The 2011 general elections were the third to be conducted by the Electoral Commission since the transition of government from military civil rule in 1999. The preceding elections of 2003 and 2007 were criticized for not meeting the minimum standards for organizing

nationalelections [12]. After a rigorous assessment of the things that it inherited, the Commission put in place a new system for achieving the set goals. Critical to the achievement of these goals was the need for a new credible biometric register of voters which the Commission resolved to compile. This was successfully executed in January - February 2011 with over 73.5 million voters registered.

#### OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

This paper sought:

1. To examine card reader failure and its effect on participation in Nigeria's general elections.
2. To determine the effects of lack of electoral materials on electoral participation in

Nigeria.

3. To establish the effects of cost of registration forms and how it affects voters participation in general elections in Nigeria.

#### METHODOLOGY

##### Research Design

This paper adopted descriptive survey design which sought the opinions of the people about the Electoral Process and National Security in Nigeria: A

Comparative Study of the 2011 and 2016 Elections in Nigeria with a particular reference Ebonyi State, was the focus of this paper.

##### Area of the Study

The area this study covered is Ebonyi State which is in Southeastern part of Nigeria. Ebonyi State is inhabited and populated primarily by the Igbos. Its capital and largest city is Abakaliki. Ebonyi State was one of the six states created in 1996 by the then federal military government of General Sani Abacha. The State of Ebonyi was created

from parts of both Enugu and Abia States, which in turn were initially constituents of the old Anambra and Imo States respectively. It has three senatorial zones (north, south & central), thirteen local government areas as well as local development centers created by the state government.

##### Population for the Study

The population for this paper consists of one hundred and fifty five thousand, five hundred and forty eight (155,548)

inhabitants in Ebonyi State, according to the National Population Commission Gazette, NO. 2 Vol.96 (2016), Abuja.

##### Sample and Sampling Techniques

The probability sampling technique was used. This gives each member of the population equal chance as representative of the entire population. This technique guided the paper in taking a sample that was representative enough to arrive at a reliable outcome.

The samples size was determined through the formula of Taro Yamani 1964:280. The formula states that:  $n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$ . The sample comprised of the 390 respondents that were randomly selected from the Ezza-South Local Government Areas of Ebonyi State.

##### Instrument for Data Collection

The main instrument used in collecting data was a structured questionnaire. The 130 copies of questionnaire which

were distributed were also completed and returned.

##### Validation of the Instrument

The coefficient of validity was 65.

##### Reliability of the Instrument

The coefficient of reliability was 70.

##### Method for Data Collection

This study employed both the primary and secondary methods. The primary

method provided the quantitative data that were analyzed statistically, while

the secondary method provided the qualitative data that were sourced from already existing relevant literatures. It included materials from published and unpublished mainly journals, newspapers, published textbooks and

internet articles. The instrument was administered to the respondents with the help of two research assistants to ensure that all the six selected public secondary schools were properly covered.

Method of Data Analysis

A standard mean was calculated in order to identify the statements which represented the popular opinion. It was agreed that any items that had a mean

score of 2.50 and above will be accepted while any one that scored lower than that will be rejected.

Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation Of Data

This section deals with the presentation of data collected from the questionnaire administered, the analysis of data obtained for the purpose of this paper and the presentation of the findings and observations thereof. The major source of data collected was from the primary source. That is, the use of questionnaire administered to respondents. The questionnaire items were analyzed individually. The questionnaire was distributed to three hundred and ninety

eight sample subjects chosen for the study. Out of the three hundred and ninety eight questionnaires distributed, three hundred and ninety were completed and returned successfully, while 8 was lost. This represents 98% collection while 2% was lost. A mean analysis method was used to analyze the data collected. Question 1: Does card reader failure affect voter's participation in Nigeria's general elections?

Table 1: Mean rating on the card reader failure which affect voter's participation in Nigeria general election.

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	SD	D	N	FX	X	DECISION
1	It makes the voters to be less interested in the elections	210	130	30	20	390	1310	3.36	Agreed
2	It disqualifies most electorates that are legible.	260	100	20	10	390	1390	3.56	Agreed
3	It calls for excessive thuggery and conflicts during and after election periods.	240	70	40	20	390	1270	3.25	Agreed
4	Card readers delay discourages massive turn out of voters during election periods.	280	90	15	5	390	1440	3.69	Agreed
5	It makes the elections in the country not to be free and fair	270	100	20	10	390	1450	3.72	Agreed

From the table above, item 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 had a mean score of 3.36, 3.56, 3.25, 3.69 and 3.72 respectively. This indicated high rate of acceptance of the content of the research items by the respondents. It can then be concluded that the effect of card reader failure on voter's participation in Nigeria general election includes among others that; it makes the voters to be less interested in

the elections, It disqualifies most electorates that are legible, It calls for excessive thuggery and conflicts during and after election periods, and discourages massive turn out of voters during election periods which makes the elections in the country not to be free and fair. Question 2; Does lack of electoral materials affect voter's participation in Nigeria general election?

Table 2: Mean rating on the effects of lack of electoral materials on voter's participation in Nigeria general elections.

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	SD	D	N	FX	X	DECISION
6	It disenfranchises some legible voters.	280	80	30	20	390	1450	3.72	Agreed
7	It discourages full democracy as there is limitation on the number of people to vote	210	120	40	20	390	1340	3.34	Agreed
8	Some physically challenged citizens are not allowed to participate fully in the electoral process.	180	160	30	20	390	1310	3.36	Agreed
9	It paves way for rigging during the election periods as the strong take advantage of the weak.	250	100	30	10	390	1400	3.59	Agreed
10	It discourages free, fair and credible elections.	190	170	20	10	390	1320	3.38	Agreed

From the presentations made above, items 6 to 10 had a mean value ranging from 3.36 to 3.72 which showed that the items were accepted. It can be deduced that the effects of lack of electoral materials on voter's participation in Nigeria's general elections include among others: disenfranchisement of some legible voters, discouragement of full democracy as there are limitations on the number of people to vote, and paves way for rigging during the election periods as the strong take advantage of the weak and discourage free, fair and credible elections. Question three; Does the high cost of candidate's forms have impact on voter's participation in general elections in Nigeria?

Table 3: Mean rating on the impact of high cost of candidate's forms on voter's participation in general elections in Nigeria.

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	SD	D	N	FX	X	DECISION
12	the rich take advantage of the electoral process as they can buy their way out	230	120	25	25	390	1355	3.47	Agreed
13	The poor can hardly contest in any election due to the cost of the forms for the various posts	190	170	20	10	390	1320	3.38	Agreed
14	Wrong candidates are choose most often as the right people cannot fund the costs of their electoral bills.	150	170	40	30	390	1220	3.13	Agreed
15	Young people that have something to deliver are scared away with high costs of registration forms	260	100	20	10	390	1390	3.56	Agreed
16	The aspirants if voted in will end up embezzling public fund to cover their excessive expenses during theregistration period.	240	120	25	5	390	1375	3.53	Agreed

Considering Table 3 above, all the research items were all accepted by the respondents. The items scored a mean value ranging from 3.13 to 3.56 which showed high level of acceptance of the contents of the research items. It can then be deduced that impact of high cost of candidate's forms on voter's participation in general elections in Nigeria includes, among others, that; the rich take advantage of the electoral process as they can buy their way out,

Card reader's failure affects voter's participation in Nigeria general elections. This hypothesis was tested with respect to table 1, question 1-5 of the questionnaire distribution which stated that card reader's failure affected

the poor can hardly contest in any election due to the cost of the forms for the various posts, wrong candidates are chosen most often as the right people cannot fund their bills, young people that have something to deliver are scared away with cost of registration and the aspirants if voted in will end up embezzling public fund to cover their excessive expenses during the registration and voting periods period.

#### Test of Hypothesis 1

voter's participation in Nigeria general elections in 2015. The statistical tool used was the chi-square, using a contingency table previously calculated through the use of mean analysis method.

Contingency Table

Alternatives	Frequency (No)	Percentage (%)
Agreed	120	32.8
Strongly agreed	200	49.2
Disagreed	40	9.7
Strongly disagreed	20	5.6%
Undecided	10	2.8%
Total	390	100%

Expected frequency (E) - 390=

Option (O)	Exp. Freq. (E)	O-E	(O-E) <sup>2</sup>	(O-E) <sup>2</sup> /E
120	78	42	1764	22.62
200	78	122	14884	109.82
40	78	-38	1444	18.51
20	78	-58	3364	43.13
10	78	68	4624	59.28
Total				253.36

Therefore, calculated frequency = 253  
 To compute the degree of freedom (DF)  
 or critical value = DF = (R-1)(C-1)

Where;

R= Number of rows which is 5

C= number of columns which is 2

$$\therefore DF = (5-1) (2-1)$$

$$= (4) (1)$$

$$= 4 \times 1 = 4$$

The research assumed 95% level of confidence and 5% level of significance. The degree of freedom (DF) at 4 = 9.488

Decision Rule

If the calculated Chi-square value is greater than the critical value, that is degree of freedom (DF) at 4, the

alternative hypothesis is accepted while the null hypothesis is rejected and vice versa.

Conclusion

From the above computation, the Ha is hereby accepted since the calculated value (X<sup>2</sup>) (253) is greater than the critical value (9.488). So, the scenario has

confirmed that cardreader's failure had negative impact on the 2015 Nigerian elections.

Hypothesis 2

Lack of electoral materials affects voters participation in Nigeria's general elections. This hypothesis was tested with respect to table 2, questions 6-10 of the questionnaire. The statistical tool used was the chi-square, using a contingency table previously calculated through the use of mean analysis method.

$$\text{Expected frequency (E)} = \frac{390}{5} = 78$$



Option (O)	Exp. Freq. (E)	O-E	(O-E) <sup>2</sup>	(O-E) <sup>2</sup> /E
120	78	42	1764	22.62
200	78	122	14884	109.82
40	78	-38	1444	18.51
20	78	-58	3364	43.13
10	78	68	4624	59.28
Total				253.36

Therefore, calculated frequency = 253  
To compute the degree of freedom (DF)  
or critical value = DF = (R-1) (C-1) = 4

The research assumed 95% level of confidence and 5% level of significance. The degree of freedom (DF) AT 4 = 9.488.

#### Decision Rule

If the calculated Chi-square value is greater than the critical value, that is degree of freedom (DF) at 4, the

alternative hypothesis is accepted while the null hypothesis is rejected and vice versa.

#### CONCLUSION

From the above computation, the Ha is hereby accepted since the calculated value ( $X^2$ ) (253) is greater than the critical value (9.488). So, the result has

confirmed that lack of electoral materials affected voter's participation in Nigeria general elections in 2015.

#### Hypothesis 3

High costs of registration forms for candidates have impacted on voter's participation in general elections in Nigeria. This hypothesis was tested with respect to table 3, question 11-15 of the questionnaire distribution which stated that high costs of registration of candidate's form have

impacts on voter's participation in general elections in Nigeria in 2015. The statistical tool used was the chi-square, using a contingency table previously calculated through the use of mean analysis method.

Expected frequency (E) =  $\frac{390}{5} = 78$

Option (O)	Exp. Freq. (E)	O-E	(O-E) <sup>2</sup>	(O-E) <sup>2</sup> /E
120	78	42	1764	22.62
200	78	122	14884	109.82
40	78	-38	1444	38.51
20	78	-58	3364	43.13
10	78	68	4624	59.28
Total				253.36

Therefore, calculated frequency = 253.  
To compute the degree of freedom (DF)  
or critical value = DF = 4. The research

assumed 95% level of confidence and 5% level of significance. The degree of freedom (DF) AT 4 = 9.488.

#### Decision Rule

If the calculated Chi-square value is greater than the critical value, that is degree of freedom (DF) at 4, the

alternative hypothesis is accepted while the null hypothesis is rejected and vice versa.

#### CONCLUSION

From the above computation, the Ha is hereby accepted since the calculated value ( $X^2$ ) (253) is greater than the critical value (9.488). So, the results

have confirmed that card reader's failure had negative impact on the 2015 Nigeria's elections

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Based on the data collected and analyzed for this paper and the hypotheses tested, the following findings were established: i. Card readers failure affected voter's participation in 2015 Nigeria General Elections. ii. Hoarding or lack of electoral

materials affected voter's participation in 2015 Nigeria General Elections. iii. High costs of candidate's registration form negatively impacted on voter's participation in 2015 General Elections in Nigeria.

### CONCLUSION

Many Nigerians were not committed to the electoral process and other political engagements. This paper shows that the Nigerian political system and governance do not encourage mass participation. This was because of the political culture of violence, intimidation, manipulation, rigging, sentiments. Money politics, ignorance, corruption, general insecurity, omission of voters names, deception and apathy that characterize the political system which consequently led to poor access to polling units or stations and so hindered voters' participation in elections. Polling units or stations in most communities were characterized by violence and intimidation during the 2015 elections. This study also showed that card readers' failure had negative impact on the 2015 general elections in Nigeria. There were cases of political assassinations, in Ebonyi State during the 2015 electoral process, hoarding of electoral materials some qualified voters did not vote due to shortage of voting materials. These had negative impact on the 2015 general elections in Nigeria. Nigerians do not have trust and confidence in their political leaders. Most political leaders were found to be selfish and not responsive to the needs of the citizens. Political leaders made promises that were never fulfilled after gaining political power. Democratic and responsible governance have not been

entrenched into the Nigerian political system. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) however played key roles in voting participation through voter education and mobilization of human and material resources for the elections. A large number of voters were also encouraged by INEC's assurances of credible polls. The commission's performance in the area of provision of electoral security was largely below the mark and this accounted for the low voting participation in the elections. The factors that had more influence on voters were; the negative attitude of the candidates, the desire to change the party in power due to poor performance, the use of the smart card reader and fairness of the zoning arrangement. Party image played the least importance in voters' decision to vote. Voting behaviour in the election was not in conformity with INEC's electoral guidelines. Voters were not orderly during accreditation, voting, sorting, counting and declaration of results. In spite of all these, the election was characterised by low voter turnout with the anticipation of rigging, insecurity, dissatisfaction with the performance of elected representatives, general lack of interest in the election, and people's valuation of the rewards of their activities on the election day, as reasons for poor voting for the elections

### RECOMMENDATIONS

From the research on electoral process and voters participation in Nigeria with focus on the 2015 general elections in Ebonyi State, the following recommendations are made:

- i. INEC needs to improve in the area of electoral security. The electorates, election officials and sensitive election materials require adequate security during elections.

- ii. Political parties should be encouraged to improve on their public image through the entrenchment of internal democracy and good governance when elected into power.
- iii. INEC can also encourage increased political participation by improving on its use of the election technology of smart card readers in future elections to minimize the delays that were

witnessed during past elections due to technical hitches.

iv. There is need for mass political education and enlightenment in Nigeria.

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