

Participation and Voting Policy Process in Nigeria: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Participatory policy process in Nigeria is prominently known to be elites dominating the entire process, and control every bit of its stages. In such cases, citizens participate to fulfill the requirements. Various contending views provide account of different facets of policy process with little attempts to assess actual experience. The scenario of e-voting policy process in Nigeria provides citizens with limited choice to influence the policy. Given the fact that policies produced from true sense of participatory process stand the chance for adoption, bring to the fore, the need to envisage extent of citizens' participation in e-voting decision. In view of the foregoing and the need to evaluate real life experiences concerning e-voting policy antecedent, this study adopt face-to-face qualitative interview to explore the extent of citizens' participation in the e-voting policy process as a potential challenge affecting adoption. Real experience accounts of the participants revealed bureaucratic oriented Nigerian policy process mainly dominated by elites. The accounts demonstrated the extent to which citizens are deprived and isolated from e-voting policy. Hence, the call to policy makers in Nigeria to be sensitive to the opinions of the citizens toward shaping policy direction as a requisite for e-voting adoption and socioeconomic development.

Keywords: e-Voting, e-Voting Policy, Participation, Participatory Policy Process, Nigeria.

1. Introduction

Voting is an essential mechanism of democratic institution that allows citizens' participation in decision to select limited number of people to positions of authority. Through voting, citizens exercise their undeniable right of participating in democratic decision. Voting is therefore the beauty of democracy. Despite the vital position voting occupies, decision to select voting method in Nigeria suffer from poor citizens' participation and worse, undefined participatory policy framework that undermine effective citizens' engagement. In present Nigerian democratic atmosphere, e-voting technology was proposed as a platform to bring sanity into the electoral process that has been criticized of being porous. Although the proposal could not scale through the parliamentary screening for 2015 general election, the issue continues to garner momentum and will eventually reverberate sooner or later. However, the proposed voting policy is aligned more to external impetus than internal initiative. The antecedent trailing the proposal emanated from the recommendations by the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES) that INEC should introduce computerized Direct Data Capture Machine (DDCM) for 2007 voters registration exercise with the sole objective of producing comprehensive permanent voters' registration card/database; prevent multiple voting and prepare ground for full pledge electronic voting (INEC, 2007; Maiye & McGrath, 2008). Complementing the external motivation rallying the antecedent of 2007 e-voters' register, likely e-voting policy initiated from a notion of "development" as obtained in the advanced countries of the western cannot be disputed. In the words of the Chairman INEC, Jega . . . "the whole world is moving in the direction of increasing the use of technology in order to have credible elections" (Jega INEC Website, 2012). More daunting given the above antecedent, hardly a policy is heralded by the rigors of scientific inquiry involving citizens' opinions or at least political referendum. Juxtaposing this scenario of theory and practice in Nigeria vis-à-vis e-voting policy, seeming disconnection between research and policy is an undisputable reality of most developing countries. Participatory policy making in the context of the proposed e-voting assumes an adorable pearl in the shelf of policy researchers craving for vigorous exploration.

Public policies and democratic decisions are meant to solve citizens' problems and or advance their course. This

point underscores effectiveness of policy and democratic decisions to the development of society and its economic prosperity. Lies at the heart of effective policies and democratic decisions, citizens' acceptance and sustainability of the policies. Citizens' participation and ways to improving it is the subject of an ongoing debate that required increasing attention to repositioning the vital role of citizens in ensuring successful policies. History of public policy in developing countries of Africa has been of manipulation, recalcitrant reproduction of wash-wash policies and archive of their carcasses. Average life span of public policies and democratic decisions in developing countries is short. One major reason responsible for the short-lived of most government policy is elitist domination of the policy process at the detriment of citizens' participation. Public policy is susceptible to premature termination in the circumstance it lacks basic support of the citizens. Hence, citizens' participation in the policy process becomes a major issue of concern.

1.1 Direct Participation versus Indirect Participation

The discussions juxtaposing indirect (elite dominated policy) as against direct citizens' participation has been an ongoing debate. Proponent of indirect citizens' participation represented by advocates of representative democracy criticize direct citizens' participation of among others, the tendencies of the opinion of uninformed public to override rationality and expertise, and tyranny of the majority. According to this view, indirect participation simplifies the complexities through technical, political and administrative expertise of officials designated and trained for the purpose. The ideas place a barrier between policy makers, in most cases educated elites assign to public offices at one hand and uninformed majority (citizens) on the other. It also contemplates that given the size and a complexity of modern society, direct citizens' participation is a mere utopia (Dahl, 1989). Given the present democratic societies that involve large population, the major challenge of direct citizens' participation is that of distinguishing reality from myth (Buck & Stone, 1981). The advocates of elitists' policy orientation further argued that knowledge and capacity to participate are conditions for the citizens' participation in political, technical and administrative policies and decisions (Barber, 1984; Box, 1998). They maintained a ground that for the citizens to effectively take part in policymaking, there is need for them to have professional assistance. Conclusively, a hypothetical period of direct citizens' participation has reached its terminal red spot (Robert, 2004).

Furthermore, traditional perspective to indirect citizens participation hold a negative view of direct citizens' participation into policy process due to cost of participation (Ebdon & Franklin, 2006; Robbins, Simonsen, & Feldman, 2008), fear of losing control of the process, (Kweit & Kweit, 1984; Moynihan, 2003), and misrepresentation of public interest (Heikkila & Issett, 2007). Although the traditional perspective seems silent on the effect of non-participation of citizens on citizens acceptance of the policy, it cannot be grounded completely as constructive participation require participants to be adequately informed and educated on public issues and interest as well as grasp clear understanding of the trade-offs associated with participation. Fung (2006) asked whether who would participate "possess the information and competence to make good judgments and decisions?" Apparent lack of these qualities among most communities in Nigeria can render participation burdensome, and propel eventual confusion.

On the other wing, advocates of direct citizens' participation contended that direct participation of citizens in policy and democratic decisions is the viable means of resolving conflicts, enhanced institutional accountability, and an avenue where potentials of private individuals could be transforming into public goods. A good policy process places considerable emphasis on resourcefulness of citizens and take into cognizance their conditions and point of views. In essence, policy can be more effective when it is considered not only an avenue where citizens express their interests but also process where citizens identify problems, engage in problems' solving, monitor situations, convince other stakeholders and mobilize resources (Moro, 2005). Quality participation must allow unconditional participation of citizens at all the stages of the policy process, initiation inclusive. In the policymaking process, sincerity, equity, justice and transparency of the process are important guiding principles if policies are to reflect true interest of the citizens as against elites' imposition. A policy breed from the product of citizens' participation stand a better chance for adoption than a perceived externally imposed policy.

In accordance with the positivist perspective, public participation is a facilitating engine to better policy formulation and implementation decisions that can engender efficient and effective service delivery of the public agency (Beierle & Cayford, 2002, Fagotto & Fung, 2009, Fung, 2004; Fung, 2006; Roberts, 1997; Sirianni, 2009; Stivers, 1990). The perspective is instrumental in analyzing the normative and instrumental benefits that could be derived when evaluating effectiveness of citizen participation. For instance, Irvin and Stansbury (2004) identified such benefits from process oriented (public knowledge and greater cooperation) and outcome oriented (better policy formulation and implementation). On the same vein, Nabatchi (2010) distinguished four great values of participation comprising of (i) intrinsic benefits/value in and of itself regardless of outcomes; (ii) educative and empowerment of citizens' skills and

dispositions through increased knowledge of the policy process (iii) capacity building of the entire community; and (iv) instrumental benefits for policy and governance.

In the contemporary sphere of governance, government authorized policy makers comprising of government elected and administrative officials are usually deficient in knowledge, competence, resourcefulness and respect to command compliance and cooperation (Fung, 2006). The view that stress the fact that bureaucrats make decisions based on their narrow specialized knowledge (Beierle & Cayford, 2002; Fung, 2006) brought the importance of resourcefulness of citizens as problem solving partners in progress that can help in understanding circumstances that otherwise might not be foreseen by the bureaucrats. Through participation, citizens can provide context specific information with considerable accuracy that can translate into achieving broad public goals that otherwise might not be possible. Instead, decisions may suffer avoidable error (Fung, 2004; Fung, 2006). Complexities associated to absence of modalities pose challenges to bureaucrats-public participation relationship. Holistic problems solving strategies based on context specific with clearly defined task and procedure have therefore been advocated (Fung, 2004; Sirianni, 2009), most especially through qualitative participatory mode of inquiry. In the same vein, similar appeal is made in the context of governance that citizens' involvement in administrative decisions can harmoniously geared towards harnessing overall objective of the agency based on community needs (Stivers, 1990, 1994). Citizens' participation according to Moynihan, (2003) induces innovative solutions to public problems, and ensures allocative and managerial efficiency of the public agency.

However, discussions on the feasibility of direct citizens' participation is inconclusive in that a number of parameters require critical evaluation, thus, the levels of government and the type of sectors involved, nature of the issues at the stake and the phase of policy process; size and kind of the groups involved, including instruments for participation (Robert, 2004). Others areas in cogent need of special attention include socioeconomic and political setting of the society in question, legal provisions, rule of law and degree of constitutionalism without which direct citizens' participation could be far from reality. The staggering question is about how to systematically relate public participation to the core objective of administration bordering on efficient and effective public service delivery, and importantly, acceptance of administrative decision.

1.1.1 Participation and the Question of Missing Link

Some of the rarely assessed challenges associated with democratic institutions in developing countries include societal values, tradition and belief system; absence or poor state of prerequisite complementary ICT infrastructure leading to inaccurate diagnosis of the actual problems (Maiye & McGrath, 2008), and to a greater extent determine pattern of the public policy. The dilemma of policy process in developing countries symbolizes apparent lack of articulated approach to participatory policy process. For guiding our discussion towards better understanding of participatory policy, it is pertinent to ask what participation in policy meant to achieve.

Participatory policy is popularly conceptualized as the citizens' involvement in taking decisions affecting them (Agarwal, Mittal, & Rastogi, 2003; Onu & Chiamogu, 2012). It is often mentioned that participation is the essence of democracy (Roberts, 2004) and democracy is a game of number and so is the concept of participatory decision. In organizational management, participation is a characteristic of good decision making, presumably, the more inclusiveness and numbers of the actors involved the better the policy process. The quality, effectiveness and legitimacy of public policy are therefore measured by the extent to which wide range of policy actors participate in the process (Hai, n.d.). Various contending views rolled out to conceptualize effective policy process have failed to withstand the test of counter argument of some sorts.

1.1.2 Participation as Access to Public Information

E-government scholars have view e-government initiatives comprising of e-democracy, e-administration and e-participation as catalyst to facilitate increase in participation of democratic process (Grant, Hall, Wailes, & Wright, 2006; MacKenie & Wajcman, 1999; Williams & Edge, 1996; Carter & Belanger, 2012). Embedded in this viewpoint, participation is measured by the amount of information accessible to citizens. Accordingly, participation entails related activities of searching and accessing information as well as providing feedback by the policy actors. Hence, technology is considered a viable means to enabling citizens' access public information freely and conveniently (Majekodunmi, 2013). Conceding the idea, Omogbadeguni, Uwadia and Ayo (2010) stressed that provision of high-quality information relevant to the citizens is the ultimate goal for deploying ICT in democratic process. Electronic transactions enable dominant stakeholders to collect clients' information as an input for strategic decision-making (Basu, 2004).

A perspective by the advocates of good governance suggests that public participation facilitate better policy formulation and implementation decisions that engender efficient and effective service delivery of the public agency (Beierle & Cayford, 2002, Fagotto & Fung, 2009, Fung, 2004; Roberts, 1997; Sirianni, 2009). De Jong, van Hoof and Gosselt (2007) distinguished four characteristics of quality services delivery e-government is aimed to achieve, thus efficiency, effectiveness, accessibility and accountability. In view, evidence have shown that e-government and e-democratic literature offered considerable rhetoric on availability and accessibility of information to citizens however with little details concerning ability of the citizens to (freely) identify, process and interpret relevant information. Furthermore, it is inconclusive as provision of high quality information and making the process more accessible can only make citizens more of information consumers rather than rightful stakeholders with ability to legitimately influence and determine policy decision outcome. Information provided by government and its agencies are so restrictive and limited, aim to achieving specific purpose, and therefore insufficient for freedom thirsty minds.

Despite e-government research is full of rhetoric benefits of participation such as transparency, accountability, efficient and effectiveness, the challenges remain lack of conditions for capacity building, awareness-creation as well as clearly defined vision and strategic goals of e-governance implementation (Adesola, 2012), a basis for a seemingly new window for participation. In addition, substituting direct citizens' participation with technological device constrict the chances of citizens' participation to technology savvy and people that can afford technological devices amidst prohibited cost of computers and internet broadband in the developing countries, particularly Nigeria. Therefore, technology mediated participation can only increase elite domination and control of policy process than providing avenue for citizens' participation. The quality and acceptability of administrative decisions are essential dimensions for the evaluation of degree of public inclusion (Thomas, 1995). Deploying technology to the justification of quality participation is another form of millennium campaign by the elites to continue perpetuates dominance over citizens through highly improvised mechanism of manipulation and control (technology). Use of modern technology notwithstanding, restricting participation to inviting citizens' opinions, informing them, counting number of the participants portray participation as mere window dressing rituals of the elites to fulfill the requirements; justify and legitimize the process (Arnstein, 1969). Klischewski and Scholl's (2006) concluded that through investigating the issue of quality in the e-government research, skills and capacity of the participants to handle complexities of their tasks raise a simple question, to what extent citizens participate in public decision such as e-voting adoption.

1.1.3 Deliberative Policy Process

Government officials routinely deploy various means to solicit public input in decision-making process. Some of such means include public comment, public hearing, and drafting public report on government activities. Despite these routines, continual citizens' demand for increase participation symbolize discontent with past public participation experience and loss of trust in the government agency and by extension public officials (Maxwell, 2001; Graham & Phillips, 1998). However, the question is not of whether public information is being solicited in the process of decision-making, but more importantly, to what extent people are being consulted (Ryfe, 2005). This is because, genuine policy process thrives through effective participation of stakeholders rather than imposition also called, top-down approach to policy (Ahmad, Abdullah, & Arshad, 2015). Robust participatory policy process stressed the need for contextualization of effectiveness.

A new window of participatory policy process emphasized on two-way deliberative method of public policy between the policy experts and the participants, and among the participants. Deliberative participation transient beyond mere consultation to a rather, broader question of degree to which the public influence decision outcome. In concordance with deliberative policy advocates, effectiveness of participatory policy hinge on the degree of involving the stakeholder as well as incorporating public input into the final decision (Abelson, Forest, Eyles, Smith, Martin, & Gauvin, 2003; Ryfe, 2005). The approach throw more weight on informed citizens; effective and legitimate public participation framework with a strong evaluation component. Beyond just and legitimate, public agencies are required to possess the necessary information, ingenuity, technical know-how and resourcefulness in order for the policy to be effective (Fung, 2006).

Deliberative method of policy process acknowledge the importance of deliberate and conscious engagement of stakeholders comprising of policy makers, regulators, expert and policy advocacy groups to discuss issues that affect them (Abelson et al., 2003). In this process, decision-making required participants to be informed about the issues in order for the deliberation to be meaningful. In the context of decision making, deliberative public policy is so tasking given the required traits such as knowledge, skills, motivation, and civic identity for the process to be effective (Ryfe, 2005). Ryfe's (2005) deliberative participatory policy stages involve equality, legitimacy, reason, autonomy, representation and democracy. It is also urged that, in the realm of deliberative participation, decision outcome is contingent upon procedural

design, moderation and deliberative spirit as key to power distribution among participants without which the process may result to structural inequalities (Monnoyer-Smith & Wojcik, 2012). Distinguishing online from offline deliberative participation, Monnoyer-Smith and Wojcik (2012) explained evaluative criteria for effective deliberative policy process in nine points count including equity, justification, expression of respect, justification towards the common good, interactivity and sincerity. In the context of decision-making, policy outcome consisting of legitimacy and accountability are important evaluative mechanism than the policy process (Abelson et al., 2003). To Ryfe (2005), rules, stories, leadership, stake and apprenticeship are five essential mechanisms critical for deliberative participatory process to be effective.

Studies on deliberation, though sizeable, cannot address the rigor of in-depth and substances. Buttressing the deficit of the approach, why to consult, with whom and about what to engage stakeholders has been a mind-boggling question. Laden with numerous challenges of legitimacy driven by increasing public demand and discern, advocates of deliberative policy process are however, rattle with daunting phantasm as to whether the process can lead to improved decisions.

1.2 Method and Data

Despite growing number of literature on participatory policy processes, there have been few attempts to assess actual experience (Keeley & Scoones, 1999). As a requisite for effective policy, stakeholder satisfaction with the process of the policy can translate into better understanding of the policy and subsequent adoption. In a related development, investigating deliberation in the natural political contexts in which it takes place can enhance compilation of pertinent information (Walsh, 2004). In tandem with previous studies that adopt interview approach to investigate participation (e.g Monnoyer-Smith & Wojcik, 2012), this paper adopts qualitative face-to-face interview design that does not attempt to quantify results through formal measurement of statistical summary or analysis. Rather, the philosophy of this method emphasizes on the phenomenological basis that seeks to explore, elaborate and describe "meaning" of a phenomenon under study (Newman & Benz, 1998). The face-to-face interview approach is adopted because of the newness of the e-voting technology adoption research in Nigerian context and the need to explore voice and views of the major stakeholders, especially the marginalized groups comprising of voters and party stalwarts. By this approach, in-depth and detailed view of the extent of stakeholders' participation would be obtained with a view to provide rich and comprehensive picture of participation in e-voting policymaking. Public opinion polls can be a robust means of generating as well as soliciting information about mechanism to increase commitment and participation (Abelson et al., 2003).

It is argued that the larger the number of cases the more unwieldy the study become and resulted in shallow understanding of the phenomenon. In another word, the fewer the cases is studied the more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). Given the above and as dictated by the objectives of our study, intermediate cases of 25 participants were selected based on purposive technique. Thus the respondents, which consist of voters, electoral officials and politicians as shown in the Figure 1.1, were selected from the three states of northeastern Nigeria comprising Bauchi, Gombe and Taraba.

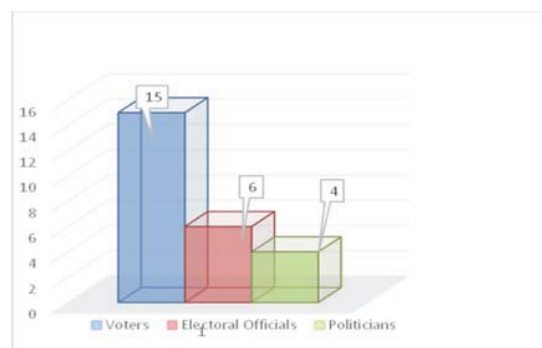


Figure 1.1. Category of the Respondents

The selection of the participants is motivated considering their critical roles in e-voting policy circle as policy initiators, planners, implementers and users or beneficiary. The researchers intentionally select the interviewees with the sole purpose to maximize information-rich sources (deMarrais & Lapan, 2004; Patton, 1990) that enable detailed understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell 2012). The study used semi structured interview format with predetermined list of questions while probing questions were also asked. Content analysis in which initial coding starts with relevant

research findings was adopted. More so, during data analysis, themes were allowed to emerge from the data. The technique involves systematic and transparent procedures for processing and analyzing data in order to arrive at valid and reliable inferences.

1.2.1 Demographic Information of the Respondents

Demographic characteristics of the respondents are considered important to the study, as they are capable of providing plausible explanations on the seeming digital divides among various groups, thus, gender, age, level of education, residential location, level of income and level of computer skills. Categorical scales (nominal) have been adopted to measure the demographic variables, thus

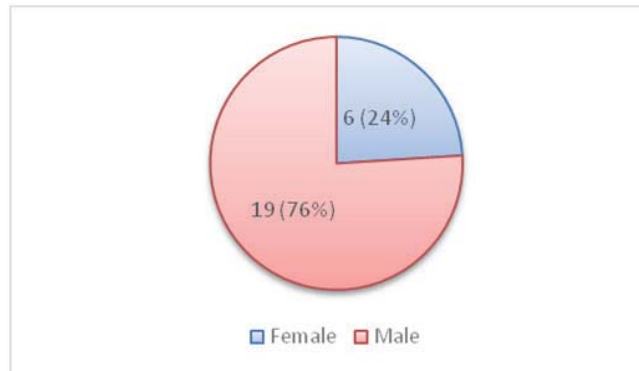


Figure 1.2 Gender Distribution of the Respondents

Gender distribution depicted in Figure 1.2 illustrated that the distribution is skewed in favor of male against female. This is because gender discrimination of women is deeply rooted in the cultures and belief systems of northern Nigerian communities that subsequently lead to women isolation from political activities. Hence, this account for the reason behind the lopsided response with mainly male domination.

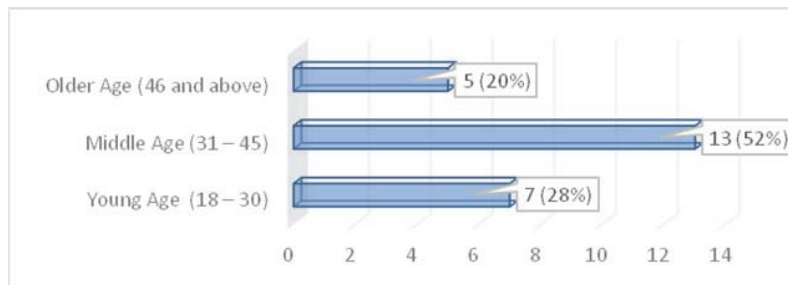


Figure 1.3 Age Distributions of the Respondents

According to respondents' age distributions depicted in Figure 1.3 sample of this study largely comprised of youth between 31 to 45 age brackets. Respondents within the category of 46 years and older being the least.

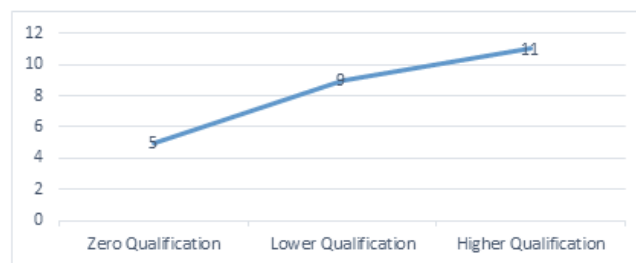


Figure 1.4 Educational Qualification of the Respondents

The descriptive statistics further revealed that majority of the respondents constituting up to 44% have higher educational qualification whereas 36% have lower educational qualification. However, 20% of the respondents have no formal educational qualification.

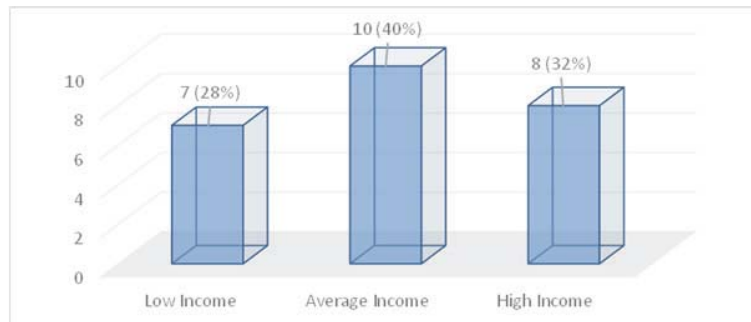


Figure 1.5 Income Distribution of the Respondents

As an important variable of digital divides, income distributions revealed that the majority of the study's respondents have fallen within the categories of average income earners. The distribution is in partial reflection of the general/overall income distributions in Nigerian population (National Bureau of Statistics: Nigeria Poverty Profile, 2010; Harmonized Nigeria Living Standard Survey, 2010).

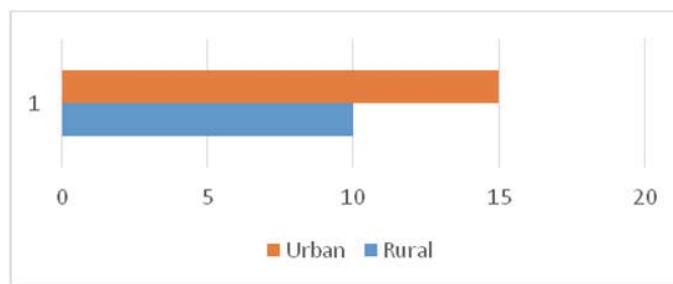


Figure 1.6 Residential Status of the Respondents

The proposition that roll to motion, the argument of whether voting technology exacerbates the existing digital divides between rural and urban people, brings to relevance of residential status of the respondents. Literature indicated that people living in urban cities are likely to have better exposure to voting innovation and in turn increase chances of their voting as compare to rural dwellers (Tolbert & McNeal, 2003). Figure 1.6 illustrated residential status of our respondents. In this connotation, rural residence involved any settlement/housing area other than the state capitals. Inability of the study to conceptualize semi-urban residence contributed in classifying a large number of respondents as rural populace.

1.2.2 Data

Exploring potential challenges of citizens' participation in public elections using e-voting technology in Nigeria, we present undiluted accounts of interviewees concerning citizens' participation in the e-voting policy process. The steps of qualitative analysis were according to the guidelines by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) and Creswell (2012). The steps include data preparation, defining unit of analysis, developing categories and code scheme, testing of coding scheme on a sample of text, assessing coding consistency, drawing conclusion from the coded data and reporting methods and findings. The process involves a systematic and logical description and representation of opinions, views and ideas of the interviewee (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).

1.3 Bureaucratic Policy Orientation

Being a major area of concern to acceptance of public decision, participation in policy process has grave implications for acceptability and sustainability of government policies and programs, e-voting adoption inclusive. When citizens are not effectively engage in policymaking process, they may develop feeling of isolation as well as negative views to the

government programs. Hence, the tendencies of rejecting the policy outcome cannot be ruled out. At a glance, Figure 1.7 demonstrated the extent to which the respondents talked about participation in e-voting policy.

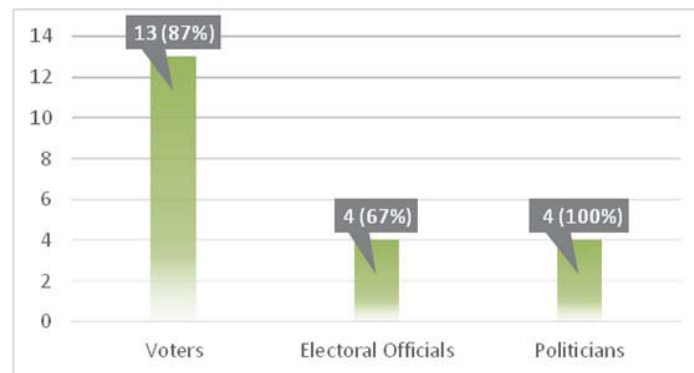


Figure 1.7 Participants discussion on the Problems of Participation in e-Voting Policymaking

From Figure 1.7, 84% of all the 25 respondents interviewed talked about inadequate participation of stakeholders and lack of inclusiveness as major potential challenge of e-voting adoption in Nigeria. In developing countries in this case Nigeria; non-elite citizens hardly allowed initiating policy. Accounts from the interviewees illustrated the extent of citizens' involvement and concern in e-voting policy process. Rather than important stakeholders in the policy formulation, citizens are mere taking for granted as recipient of e-voting policy. A female politician interviewee from low income earning category stated that citizens were neither consulted nor referendum sought before the proposed e-voting policy. Instead, citizens learnt about the proposed policy via media outfit, thus.

We are not aware neither been consulted about the proposed issue of e-voting technology by the government. We just heard the news over the air that a voting system that is quite different from the one known to us and almost all the citizens of Nigeria is being proposed (Politician 3).

Similarly, a male interviewee from higher qualification and income earning categories added, "I read it over dailies that government is planning to introduce e-voting technology in near future elections as a remedy to the shortcomings of the existing system" (Voter 1). Consequences of the scenario of elite dominating policy process caused large populace of the country into present state of despair. A politicians interviewee of urban resident described policy formulation in Nigerian context as elitist meditation and dreaming; imposition and selfish motivated. He stated that.

In the first place why will the government officials insist in using the new method [e-voting technology] while we were not being consulted as a party? See, we have representatives at both senate and house of representative they supposed to seek for views and opinions of their constituents and wards before making the policy. . . Unfortunately, the way our leaders enact policies is just a metaphor of a person that eat to his fill, enjoying sleep and begin to dream of imposing things on behalf of others. But in actual sense, it is intended to achieve selfish interest. . . We are not in support of the proposed e-voting system of election . . . by the time our democracy get matured, government doesn't have to worry itself to impose e-voting because, citizens would initiate for the change themselves (Politician1).

Developing countries are known with a culture of elite dominating public policy domain (Holmes & Scoones, 2001). When citizens are deprived quality participation in public decision, they likely develop sense of distrust and eventual loss of confidence in the government policies and programs, which is injurious to government-citizens relations. It is urged that non-elites citizens resolve to resistance in order to influence policy (Gaventa & Robinson, 1999). Denying citizens right to participate in e-voting policy despite having direct bearing on citizens as end users, induce feeling of isolation and cause worries as stated by a male interviewee of higher educational qualification, average income, and rural resident

Unfortunately, in Nigeria, the government is not consulting ordinary citizens before taking decisions even if the decisions directly affect them. More badly, even the so-called political representatives who are mainly elected to represent the interest of their constituent members are not consulting the citizens from their constituents before taking major decisions in the respective chambers. In most cases, once they were elected, they desert their constituencies only to resurface on approach of another round of elections just to seek for votes. This is the reason why people ascribe Nigerian democracy as self and family representations (Voter 7).

In developing countries in this case Nigeria, elites deliberately structure a systems to discourage citizens' participation or at worst scenario prevent it in such a way "citizens either do not know how to, do not want to, or do not even care to try" (Robert, 2004, p 317). In Nigeria, by default elites initiate policies that reflected their line of thought, experiences, dreams and affluence economic interests. Those elites are urban cities oriented exposing to lifestyle of developed societies while having limited knowledge, experiences; and concern to real problems and demands of rural life, home to majority of the populace. An electoral official interviewee of higher qualification and an average income category described e-voting policy process as bureaucratic oriented, testifying inadequate engagement of citizens and other voting stakeholders as well as stressing that the policy has not being subjected to public referendum.

We have not subjected e-voting policy to sampling public opinion. It is the electoral house that realized the need for adopting robust method of voting. . . Now that electronic voting is proposed . . . , people are apprehensive just like the time we were trying to use computers for the voters' registration. Many people were saying is not going to work. . . All of these today become history because, we were able to register people on the computers and produce more realistic voters' registration (Electoral Official 1).

In demonstrating the extent to which public policy processes in developing countries, in this case Nigeria is abused, advanced technologies are often proposed without prerequisite complementary infrastructure (Maiye & McGrath, 2008). Travelling wide across developed countries of Europe and through ICT - internet, the elites became fascinated with the development strides of the west including performance of their policies and programs. Deceit by a notion of development and without taking into cognizance differences of contextual environments; socio-economic and political antecedents, policies of the western countries are leapfrog only to seek pseudo participation of citizens of some sorts in what Arnstein (1969) typology of participation termed as manipulation, therapy, placation and tokenism. Added to this, an electoral official of higher educational qualification and high-income category stated that

The e-voting policy has not being formulated by the grass root. But that is not an issue because, the policy is formulated by the class that understand what the election is all about . . . we are working tirelessly to provide solution to all the complaints people are making against the voting system. Now that we have confident in the proposed e-voting as better option, but still people are making negative comments. In fact, we are expecting them to appreciate (Electoral Official 5).

Furthermore, the relegated role of citizens in e-voting policy process as policy recipient as against the supposed rightful stakeholder is buttress in a narration of another electoral official interviewee who stressed that

. . . I think it matters less to start questioning how the idea of e-voting system of election came into being. That is to say, it does not matter at all whether the policy is top down or bottom up. The important thing is that citizens would like to accept e-voting system of election if they are adequately sensitized and informed. Therefore, acceptance of e-voting system of election among citizens depends on the extent to which citizens are sensitized and enlightened. Here, sensitization and voters education are the most important cornerstone. If people are adequately sensitized, they will really understand their rights including what to do (Electoral Official 2).

Although the scenario of elite dominating policy arena might have multifaceted implications, the greatest of which is economic underpinning. Apparently, policies and democratic decisions in developing countries has turn into a mere conduit for siphoning public funds whereas, the policy outcomes benefit negligible percentage of the population in most cases, who control the process (elites). Nevertheless, if citizens are allowed quality participation, policy preference should have been on quality education, food security, job creation, portable drinking water, electricity, good road networks, quality health care services, housing etc. as against frivolous fantasies of space satellite, rocket, warship, cable cars, matrix cars, etc. Summarily, bureaucratic policy orientation, which is more of top – down policy process is identified as one of the major challenge of e-voting adoption in Nigeria.

1.3.1 Solutions

On the aspect of solutions in the first instance, participation of all election stakeholders in the policy formulation and implementation of the technology could be a good starting point to address the seeming challenge of e-voting adoption. In this regard, a potential voter interviewee is quoted saying "We should all acknowledge that we are in democratic dispensation in which people should determine what it should be done and not some opportunist few individuals trying to impose their interest on citizens" (Voter 7). The vital issue raised here is a question of who determine what should be done, "people or opportunistic few". The notion of top-down imposition of e-voting can be overturned by adopting a more

inclusive participatory policy process known as bottom-up policy process. Another female voter interviewee added, "A sort of referendum could be set to obtain opinion of citizens regarding adoption of the technology . . ." (Voter 11). Additionally, bottom-up policy process is emphasized as a solution to the potential challenges of e-voting adoption in a quoted statement by a voter interviewee

Government should always listen to citizens who are the users of the proposed technology and not the so-called classroom professionals. In most cases, the government just listens to classroom professional that has not gone to the field let alone understands the feelings, views and opinion of the citizens. Rather, government should utilize all avenues to obtain information from the actual users of the proposed technology and work according to their views and interest . . . Because those citizens at the grass root. . . , when consulted you will be surprise to see the kinds of useful options and opinions on best way to go about it [e-voting adoption]. If the government properly utilizes citizens' views and opinion, there shall going to be efficient and effective implementation of electoral system in the country (Voter 1).

In another perspective, the electoral officials' interviewees emphasize individual cognitive traits as important requirement for effective participation. For example, an electoral official interviewee emphasized on education and enlightenment of electorate stating that

. . . we call for voters' education, enlightenment and sensitization at schools and other public places. . . stakeholders such as political parties . . . should educate their members and supporters . . . also among the general public. . . mass media, print and electronic [should be used] to . . . Educate citizens about their right (Electoral Official 2).

In a similar trajectory, a female electoral official added

For the citizens of Nigeria to use e-voting, they need awareness, quality education and . . . There will be no development if there is no quality education. Without . . . knowledge among average citizens . . . people will only be discouraged from participation" (Electoral Official 4).

Although, voters, politicians and electoral officials alike discussed solutions to the potential challenges of participation, there seems some level of homogeneity among voters and politicians interviewees rather than electoral officials' interviewees. While voters and politicians interviewees expressed concern about legal framework and creating conducive atmosphere that warrant for participation, electoral officials stressed enlightenment creation across various stakeholders. Figure 1.8 displayed how the interviewees talked about solutions to potential challenge of participation in elections using e-voting technology.

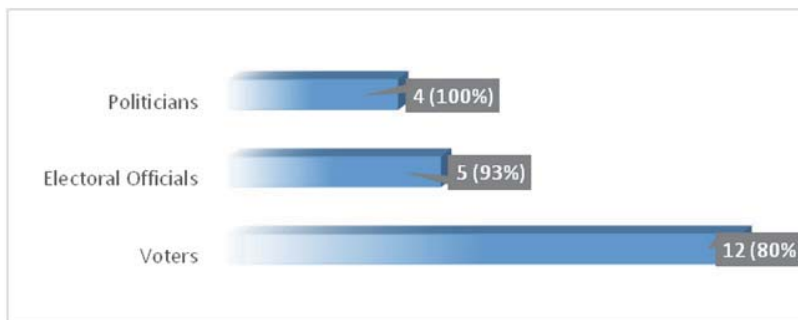


Figure 1.8 How the Interviewees talked about Solutions to Potentials Challenges of Participation

e-Voting policy is capable of enhancing citizens' adoption if it takes into cognizance substantive, all-encompassing and all inclusive definition that bind together all sorts of 'right' citizens. Inclusive participatory policy process required input of all the stakeholders at every stages of the policy circle. Such policy process can in turn yield sense of belonging and encourage participation. Engaging citizens in the decision-making process strengthen bond of trust between government and citizens that can bring about sense of collective ownership of the decision outcomes (Arfeen & Khan, 2009; Gessi, Ramnarine, & Wilkins, 2007). Moreover, ICT enhanced participatory decision-making mechanism embedded in e-democracy can enhance citizens' ability to determine their socioeconomic fortunes (Majekodunmi, 2013). Majekodunmi added that e-government could help in achieving bottom-up approach to policy process that is a requisite to supporting government policies and adoption. Conforming to this idea, Neshkova and Guo (2011) postulated that public agency exists to serve the interest of the public through efficient and effective service delivery and that greater input from citizens' participation into public decision making enable resources allocation to reflect the interest of the public.

2. Discussions and Conclusion

As an integral part of democratic decision-making, voting is a mechanism that allows citizens' participation in the act of public decision to choose their leaders. Voting cannot be treated in isolation from other chains of democratic decision-making, selecting method of voting inclusive. Quality of democracy is reciprocal to the extent to which stakeholders participate in every aspects of public life including political, social and economic (Majekodunmi, 2013). The rationale behind public participation is to ensure those affected by policy outcome have profound and meaningful influence over the policy process. The nexus of existence of public agency is to serve the interest of the public through efficient and effective service delivery and that greater input from public participation into public decision-making enable resources allocation to reflect the interest of the public, thereby enhance performance of the public agencies (Neshkova & Guo, 2011).

Views and opinions expressed by a segment of our respondents pointed out that, in Nigeria, citizens are virtually given rights to cast votes in elections without corresponding structure to accommodate active participation of citizens in other important decision-making including decision for selecting voting system. It was therefore revealed that spirit of citizens engagement in democratic decision can be handicapped by such intrigue of providing platform for citizens to cast vote without corresponding right to participate in other decision making process. The attendant consequences of depriving citizens the quality participation to democratic decision can lead to grave feeling of frustration and isolation that are key to implicating citizens' disengagement as well as withdrawal from public affairs.

E-voting scenario illustrated the extent to which decision-making process in Nigeria suffers, as neither administrative bureaucrats nor politicians elected to govern according to the dictate of public opinions cultivate the culture of consulting their constituent members before initiating, debating, or supporting public decisions. Instead, without prejudice to consequential effect on the overall outcome, public decision is fallaciously considered as restricted right of government officials who enjoy the privileges of state powers, not minding opinions of various groups of stakeholders who are directly affected by the policy, and in this case, constitutes bulk of end users of the proposed policy (e-voting). Conversely, in both principle and reality, democracy thrives in societies where citizens are offered access to information and knowledge, and better means of disseminating the information and knowledge amongst themselves, and between themselves and those in governance positions (Abelson et al., 2003; Ryfe, 2005; Majekodunmi, 2013). Hence, the need to explore structural change including power equation in the spheres of the socio-political relations to advance the course of sustainable public policy (Alabi, 2009).

By adopting all-encompassing and all-inclusive policy process, the present Nigerian democratic dispensation can overcome the challenges of e-voting technology adoption, and enhance viable means of solving socioeconomic challenges. This is because; participatory policy is a process of mutual learning and a condition for sustainability. A process that builds the capacity of the participants as substantial investment that empowers them to handle potential challenges at both the formulation and implementation stages. In a true participatory-based policy approach, citizens are neither passive consumers of public information nor puppets for pseudo compliance of requirements rather drivers, pilots and sailors of the participatory policy process. Given the weakness of the arbitrary top-down approach to e-voting policy process in Nigeria, policy makers should be sensitive to the opinions of the citizens toward shaping policy direction. Such doing would not only salvage stakeholders' frustration and feelings of isolation but also encourage adoption and subsequent diffusion. Moreover, technology adoption and policy researchers in developing countries should maximize exploration of context specific solution to problems of policy participation rather than attempt to generalize. Lawrence and Deagen (2001) concluded that problem trailing public participation is attributable to absence of universally applicable approach for diverse situations whether autocratic, consultative or participative.

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Appendix

Table A1. Detailed Demographic Data of the Interviewees

| Category | Gender | Age Bracket | Education Level | Income level | Residence | Computer literacy |
|----------------------|--------|--------------|----------------------|----------------|-----------|--------------------------|
| Voter 1 | Male | 31 – 45 | Higher Qualification | High Income | Urban | Basic Computer Skills |
| Voter 2 | Male | 18 – 30 | Lower Qualification | Average Income | Rural | No Computer Skills |
| Voter 3 | Female | 31 – 45 | Higher Qualification | High Income | Urban | Basic Computer Skills |
| Voter 4 | Male | 46 and above | Higher Qualification | High Income | Urban | Advanced Computer Skills |
| Voter 5 | Male | 31 – 45 | Zero Qualification | Low Income | Rural | No Computer Skills |
| Voter 6 | Female | 31 – 45 | Lower Qualification | Low Income | Urban | No Computer Skills |
| Voter 7 | Male | 18 – 30 | Higher Qualification | Average Income | Rural | Advanced Computer Skills |
| Voter 8 | Male | 31 – 45 | Zero Qualification | Low Income | Urban | Basic Computer Skills |
| Voter 9 | Male | 18 – 30 | Higher Qualification | Average Income | Urban | Basic Computer Skills |
| Voter 10 | Male | 18 – 30 | Lower Qualification | Low Income | Rural | Basic Computer Skills |
| Voter 11 | Female | 46 and above | Zero Qualification | High Income | Urban | No Computer Skills |
| Category | Gender | Age Bracket | Education Level | Income level | Residence | Computer literacy |
| Voter 12 | Male | 31 – 45 | Higher Qualification | Average Income | Rural | Advanced Computer Skills |
| Voter 13 | Female | 31 – 45 | Lower Qualification | Average Income | Urban | Basic Computer Skills |
| Voter 14 | Male | 18 – 30 | Higher Qualification | High Income | Urban | Advanced Computer Skills |
| Voter 15 | Male | 31 – 45 | Zero Qualification | Average Income | Rural | Basic Computer Skills |
| Electoral official 1 | Male | 31 – 45 | Higher Qualification | Average Income | Urban | Basic Computer Skills |
| Electoral official 2 | Male | 46 and above | Lower Qualification | Low Income | Rural | No Computer Skills |
| Electoral official 3 | Male | 18 – 30 | Higher Qualification | Average Income | Urban | Basic Computer Skills |
| Electoral official 4 | Female | 31 – 45 | Lower Qualification | Average Income | Rural | Advanced Computer Skills |
| Electoral official 5 | Male | 46 and above | Higher Qualification | High Income | Urban | Basic Computer Skills |
| Electoral official 6 | Male | 31 – 45 | Lower Qualification | Low Income | Urban | Advanced Computer Skills |
| Politician 1 | Male | 18 – 30 | Lower Qualification | Average Income | Rural | Advanced Computer Skills |
| Politician 2 | Male | 31 – 45 | Higher Qualification | High Income | Urban | Basic Computer Skills |
| Category | Gender | Age Bracket | Education Level | Income level | Residence | Computer literacy |
| Politician 3 | Female | 46 and above | Zero Qualification | Low Income | Rural | No Computer Skills |
| Politician 4 | Male | 31 – 45 | Lower Qualification | High Income | Urban | Basic Computer Skills |