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**IMPACT OF POLITICAL APATHY ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN KEFFI LOCAL
 GOVERNMENT AREA OF NASARAWA STATE, NIGERIA**
(2015 – 2023)

Usman Yakubu Abdullahi, Ph.D

Federal Ministry of Power, Power House, Maitama Abuja, Nigeria

Abstract

Political apathy, characterized by low voter turnout, lack of civic engagement, and disinterest in political processes, has become a significant issue in Keffi. The problem is exacerbated by the perception that political participation yields minimal benefits, leading to a decline in community involvement in governance. This has had detrimental effects on socio-economic development, as policies and programs meant to improve living standards are often underdeveloped or poorly implemented due to inadequate public input and accountability. This study investigates the impact of political apathy on socio-economic development in Keffi Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, Nigeria, from 2015 to 2023. The study adopts David Easton's (1960) Systems Theory, which views political systems as interdependent entities where changes in one part affect the whole. A survey research design was employed, using questionnaires to gather data from residents of Keffi. The findings reveal that political apathy has significantly hindered socio-economic development in the area, with a direct correlation between low political participation and poor infrastructure, inadequate public services, and slow economic growth. Among other things, the study recommends increased political awareness campaigns, improved governance transparency, and policies that encourage active citizen participation to reverse the negative trend and foster sustainable socio-economic development in Keffi.

Keywords: Political Apathy, Socio-Economic Development, Keffi LGA, Nasarawa State, Nigeria

Introduction

Political apathy in Nigeria has been a significant issue affecting the nation's democratic processes and socio-economic development. Political apathy refers to the lack of interest, enthusiasm, or concern from the populace towards political activities, including voting, participating in decision-making, and engaging in civic duties. This phenomenon is prevalent in Nigeria, where voter turnout during elections has been alarmingly low. For instance, the voter turnout in the 2019 presidential election was only 34.75%, one of the lowest in the country's history (INEC, 2019). Such disinterest in political participation can have far-reaching consequences on socio-economic development, as it undermines the legitimacy of elected leaders and weakens the foundations of democracy.

Several factors contribute to political apathy in Nigeria, including distrust in the political system, corruption, election violence, and the perception that votes do not count. Corruption, in particular, has been a significant deterrent to political participation. Nigeria has consistently ranked low on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, reflecting widespread corruption in both the public and private sectors (Transparency International, 2022). This pervasive corruption has led to a loss of faith in the ability of political leaders to address socio-economic issues, further exacerbating political apathy. Moreover, the history of military rule in Nigeria has also contributed to a culture of political disengagement. Between 1966 and 1999, Nigeria experienced several military coups, which undermined democratic institutions and fostered a sense of powerlessness among the populace. Even after the return to civilian rule in 1999, the legacy of

authoritarianism continues to impact political participation, as many Nigerians remain skeptical of the effectiveness of democratic governance (Ojo, 2017). Political apathy has had adverse effects on Nigeria's socio-economic development. When citizens disengage from the political process, it becomes difficult to hold leaders accountable, leading to poor governance and inefficient use of resources. This has resulted in slow progress in critical areas such as education, healthcare, infrastructure, and poverty reduction. Nigeria's Human Development Index (HDI) ranking remains low, indicating significant challenges in achieving sustainable development (UNDP, 2020).

Nasarawa State, located in the North-Central region of Nigeria, is not immune to the issues of political apathy and its impact on socio-economic development. The state has experienced low voter turnout in recent elections, reflecting a broader trend of disengagement from the political process. For example, in the 2019 gubernatorial election, voter turnout in Nasarawa State was only 37.5% (INEC, 2019), a figure that mirrors the national trend of declining political participation. Several factors contribute to political apathy in Nasarawa State, including ethnic and religious diversity, economic inequality, and insecurity. Nasarawa is home to various ethnic groups, including the Gwari, Tiv, Hausa, and Fulani, among others. This diversity, while a strength, has also led to ethnic tensions and conflicts, particularly over land ownership and political representation. These tensions have, at times, discouraged political participation, as some groups feel marginalized or disenfranchised (Odeh, 2020). Economic inequality is another significant factor contributing to political apathy in Nasarawa State. Despite its rich natural resources, including solid minerals, the state has struggled with high poverty rates and unemployment. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), the poverty rate in Nasarawa State was 41.4% in 2019 (NBS, 2019). This economic deprivation has fueled a sense of hopelessness and disillusionment with the political system, leading many citizens to disengage from the political process. Insecurity, particularly related to farmer-herder conflicts, has also contributed to political apathy in Nasarawa State. The state has

witnessed several violent clashes between farmers and herders over access to land and water resources, resulting in loss of lives and property. These conflicts have created an environment of fear and instability, further discouraging political participation (Olojo, 2019). The impact of political apathy on socio-economic development in Nasarawa State is evident in the state's struggle to address critical issues such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure. Poor governance and lack of accountability have hindered progress in these areas, exacerbating poverty and inequality. For instance, the state's healthcare system remains underfunded and understaffed, leading to poor health outcomes for the population (Eneji et al., 2018). Keffi Local Government Area (LGA) is one of the thirteen LGAs in Nasarawa State. It serves as a microcosm of the broader challenges faced by the state and the country as a whole regarding political apathy and socio-economic development. Keffi is a historically significant town known for its educational institutions, including the Nasarawa State University. Despite its potential for growth and development, the LGA has struggled with political apathy, which has negatively impacted its socio-economic progress. The factors contributing to political apathy in Keffi LGA are similar to those observed at the state and national levels. These include distrust in political leaders, economic challenges, and insecurity. However, Keffi also faces unique challenges that have exacerbated political disengagement. One such challenge is the perceived marginalization of certain communities within the LGA. Some residents believe that political power and resources are concentrated in the hands of a few elites, leading to unequal development across the LGA (Adamu, 2020). This perception of marginalization has fueled apathy, as many citizens feel that their participation in the political process will not lead to meaningful change. Economic challenges in Keffi LGA have also contributed to political apathy. Like the rest of Nasarawa State, Keffi has high poverty and unemployment rates. Many residents struggle to meet their basic needs, leading to a focus on day-to-day survival rather than political participation. This economic hardship has also contributed to the rise of youth unemployment, which, in turn, has led to

frustration and disengagement from the political process (Idris, 2019). Insecurity, particularly related to crime and communal clashes, has further discouraged political participation in Keffi LGA. The town has witnessed several incidents of violence, including armed robbery and clashes between different ethnic groups. These incidents have created an environment of fear and instability, making it difficult for citizens to engage in political activities (Olabode & Ajayi, 2021).

The impact of political apathy on socio-economic development in Keffi LGA is significant. Poor governance and lack of accountability have hindered efforts to address critical issues such as infrastructure development, education, and healthcare. For instance, the LGA has struggled with inadequate road networks, leading to challenges in transportation and economic activities (Nuhu, 2020). Similarly, the healthcare system in Keffi remains under-resourced, with many residents lacking access to quality medical care (Bello, 2018). Political apathy in Nigeria, Nasarawa State, and specifically Keffi Local Government Area, poses a significant threat to socio-economic development. The lack of political participation undermines the legitimacy of elected leaders and weakens democratic institutions, leading to poor governance and inefficient use of resources.

The main objective of this project work Impact of political apathy on socio-economic development in Keffi Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, Nigeria (2015 – 2023). The specific Objectives of the Study are:

- i. To assess the impact of political apathy on socio-economic development in Keffi Local Government Area.
- ii. To identify the main factors contributing to political apathy in Keffi Local Government Area.

Conceptual Review

Political Apathy

Political apathy, a condition marked by a lack of interest and engagement in political processes, has significant implications for democratic governance and

socio-economic development. This phenomenon is particularly pertinent in the context of Nigeria, where political apathy can profoundly affect local governance and development outcomes. This essay explores the concept of political apathy, its causes, consequences, and its impact on socio-economic development, with a focus on Keffi Local Government Area (LGA) in Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

Political apathy is characterized by a disengagement from political activities and a lack of concern about political processes and outcomes. This disengagement can manifest in various ways, including low voter turnout, disinterest in political discussions, and a general indifference towards political events and decisions (Eisner, 2010). Political apathy can be viewed as both an individual and collective phenomenon, where individuals disengage from political processes and, by extension, contribute to a collective decline in political engagement.

Political apathy has become a part of freedom of expression among Nigerian citizens under a democratic government. The governance that is affected by political apathy is an outcome of the level of political culture obtainable in that society. Political apathy in Nigeria is an outcome of low political culture with pattern of political behaviour that did not just happen but historically and contemporary rooted. Nigeria's political history has been characterized with unity of people with different political ideologies. Nigeria has become an entity that was created by the British colonial administration in 1914 in an event popularly known as the amalgamation of Northern and Southern protectorates. This unity, according to Nyong (2017) was propagated from a heterogeneous and pluralistic society with many autonomous states within the nation existing independently, hence the multicultural and multi-religious nature of the country. According to Kukah (2021) in his speech on insecurity and political issues in Nigeria, during the 61st Annual General Conference of the Nigeria Bar Association in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, 'we must stay, fight, and resolve all issues because Nigeria is like a Catholic marriage; it may not be happy, but it won't break up'

(in Daramola, 2021). In this statement is an embodiment of the stay of political apathy in Nigeria today. The existence of lack of willingness that is rooted in the nature of unity orchestrated by the British government. Similarly, Nyong (2017) in his article, Religious and Political Crises in Nigeria: A Historical Exploration, posited that religious violence and political instability in Nigeria today is predicated on by the 'divide and rule' and the pretentious 'amalgamation' policy of the Colonial Administrators that favoured North against the South. Historically, political activities in Nigeria has visibly shown embedded crises that when coupled with the nature of its unity can lead to political apathy as seen in Nigeria today. Adebajo (2022) revealed some case of these violence that had followed Nigerian elections: Since the country's independence, almost all of Nigeria's general elections have been marred by acts of violence. Human Rights Watch (HRW) estimates that the unrest following the first election held in 1964–1965 claimed more than 200 lives, particularly in the Southwest. Following the 1983 election, the nation also saw "massive post-election violence," which resulted in the loss of numerous lives and extensive property damage. Even the 1993 presidential election, which was widely regarded as the freest in the nation's history and had no severe violent incidents, had a spotty background.

Causes of Political Apathy

Several factors contribute to political apathy, which can be categorized into personal, social, and institutional dimensions:

Personal Factors: Individual factors such as a lack of political knowledge, perceived inefficacy, and disillusionment with political leaders play a crucial role in fostering apathy. For instance, individuals who feel that their participation will not lead to meaningful change may choose to disengage from the political process (Putnam, 2000). This sentiment is often fueled by a lack of understanding of how political systems operate or the belief that political engagement is futile.

Social Factors: Social factors include socio-economic status, education, and social networks. Lower socio-

economic status and limited educational opportunities can lead to political apathy as individuals who struggle with basic needs may prioritize economic survival over political involvement (Inglehart, 1997). Additionally, social networks that do not emphasize political engagement can contribute to a culture of apathy.

Institutional Factors: Institutional factors involve the quality and transparency of political institutions. In regions where political institutions are perceived as corrupt, inefficient, or unresponsive to the needs of the people, citizens may become disillusioned and apathetic. The lack of trust in political leaders and the perception that political processes are rigged or manipulated can also contribute to political disengagement (Dalton, 2008).

Consequences of Political Apathy

Political apathy can have far-reaching consequences for both democratic governance and socio-economic development:

Erosion of Democratic Values: Political apathy undermines democratic values by diminishing the quality of electoral processes and reducing citizen participation in governance. Low voter turnout and disengagement from political discussions weaken the legitimacy of elected officials and can lead to a less representative government (Norris, 2004). This erosion of democratic values can result in weakened accountability and increased political instability.

Impact on Governance: A lack of political engagement can lead to ineffective governance. When citizens are disengaged, there is less public pressure on political leaders to address pressing issues or implement effective policies. This can result in poorly designed policies and a lack of responsiveness to the needs of the population (Michels, 1911). In Keffi LGA, this could manifest in inadequate public services, poor infrastructure, and a general decline in the quality of life.

Socio-Economic Development: The relationship between political apathy and socio-economic development is complex. Political apathy can impede socio-economic development by reducing citizen involvement in local development initiatives and governance. Without active citizen participation, development projects may lack community support and fail to address local needs effectively (Bourdieu, 1986). In Keffi LGA, political apathy could contribute to underdeveloped infrastructure, poor educational and healthcare services, and economic stagnation.

The concept of socio-economic development

Socio-economic development is a key concept central to any problem of change in the socio economic sphere. Its significance is aptly expressed by Stemplowski (1987), who states that “the concept of development functions as both, a product of an optimistic vision and an articulation of social interests, and a tool of analysis.”

In the research on socio-economic development one can find a variety of conceptions of development. Rather than discussing them, I shall focus on the construction of the concept of socioeconomic development based on two issues: (a) the scope of the concept of this type of development and its reference, and (b) the nature of socio-economic development.

Empirical Review of Related literature

A substantial body of literature examines the relationship between political apathy and democratic governance. According to Putnam (2000), political apathy undermines democratic institutions by reducing voter turnout and civic engagement. Putnam’s research on American democracy reveals that lower levels of political participation are associated with weaker democratic institutions and less effective governance. This finding is corroborated by Norris (2004), who argues that political apathy leads to a decline in political accountability and responsiveness, which in turn hampers effective policy-making. In the context of Nigeria, political apathy has been linked to issues such as electoral fraud and corruption. According to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) (2023), Nigeria has faced challenges with low

voter turnout and widespread disillusionment among the electorate. This disillusionment is often rooted in perceptions of corruption and inefficiency within political institutions, which diminishes public trust and engagement (Adejumobi, 2011). The impact of political apathy on socio-economic development is a critical area of study. Political apathy can hinder socio-economic progress by affecting public investment in key areas such as infrastructure, education, and healthcare. According to a study by Smith (2009), regions with high levels of political apathy often experience slower socio-economic development due to reduced civic participation and engagement in local governance. Smith’s research suggests that low political engagement leads to underfunded and poorly managed development projects, exacerbating socio-economic inequalities.

Similarly, a study by Galston (2001) highlights that political apathy contributes to ineffective policy implementation and a lack of responsiveness to community needs. This is particularly evident in developing countries where political disengagement correlates with inadequate public services and infrastructure deficits. In Nigeria, a study by Akinola and Olowu (2019) found that political apathy negatively impacts socio-economic development by limiting public involvement in policy formulation and oversight, leading to poorly executed development programs. In the specific context of Keffi Local Government Area (LGA) in Nasarawa State, political apathy has been identified as a factor influencing local development outcomes. Research by Aliyu and Shehu (2020) on local governance in Nasarawa State indicates that political apathy in Keffi LGA results in low levels of citizen engagement in development initiatives. This disengagement hampers effective planning and implementation of local development projects, contributing to issues such as inadequate infrastructure and limited access to social services. Aliyu and Shehu (2020) argue that the lack of active participation in local governance leads to a disconnect between the needs of the community and the actions of local government authorities. Consequently, this disconnect manifests in socio-economic challenges,

including poor educational facilities and inadequate healthcare services in Keffi LGA.

Conversely, a lack of engagement in one's social network can contribute to apathy, as individuals may not perceive political participation as socially valued or relevant. Institutional factors, such as corruption and inefficiency within political systems, significantly impact political apathy. Research by Rose-Ackerman (1999) suggests that perceptions of corruption and ineffectiveness within political institutions can lead to widespread disillusionment and disengagement among citizens. When political systems are perceived as corrupt or unresponsive, individuals are less likely to engage in political activities or trust in the political process. The design of electoral systems also influences political engagement. Norris (2004) explores how different electoral systems affect voter turnout and political participation. Proportional representation systems, for example, are generally associated with higher voter turnout compared to majoritarian systems. Electoral systems that are perceived as fair and representative can enhance political engagement, while those perceived as flawed or unfair can contribute to apathy.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts David Easton's Systems Theory, as introduced in 1960, provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the interplay between political systems and their environment. This theory is particularly useful in analyzing the impact of political apathy on socio-economic development, as it allows for a structured examination of how political attitudes influence and are influenced by various socio-economic factors.

Systems Theory posits that political systems function as a set of interconnected elements that interact with their environment. According to Easton, a political system processes inputs (demands and support) and transforms them into outputs (policies and decisions), which in turn affect the socio-economic environment. The theory emphasizes the feedback loop where outputs impact the environment, and the resulting

changes in the environment affect future inputs to the system.

In the context of Keffi Local Government Area, political apathy can be seen as a significant input into the political system. Apathy, characterized by a lack of interest or engagement in political processes, results in reduced citizen participation in elections, policy-making, and governance. This lack of engagement can be analyzed as a form of diminished support and demand, which impacts the efficacy and responsiveness of the local political system.

Political apathy affects the transformation process within the political system. With lower levels of public participation, elected officials may face reduced pressure to address the needs and preferences of their constituents. This can lead to less responsive and less effective policy outputs. In Keffi, this might manifest in inadequate infrastructure development, poor social services, and slow economic growth, as political leaders may not prioritize the area's most affecting their apathetic constituents.

The outputs of a political system, shaped by the level of political engagement, have direct consequences for socio-economic development. In Keffi, political apathy may result in policies that do not adequately address local issues such as unemployment, education, and healthcare. The lack of public input and scrutiny can lead to misallocation of resources, ineffective development programs, and overall stagnation in socio-economic progress. For example, infrastructure projects may be underfunded or poorly managed if there is little public advocacy for accountability and improvement.

The feedback loop is crucial in understanding how political apathy influences socio-economic development. Poor socio-economic conditions resulting from ineffective policies can, in turn, contribute to further political apathy. Citizens who perceive that their participation has no impact may become even less engaged, perpetuating a cycle of disengagement and inadequate governance. This cycle can hinder the development of effective strategies to

address local challenges, further exacerbating socio-economic issues.

Applicability and Insights of the Theory to Study

Applying Easton's Systems Theory to the study of political apathy in Keffi provides valuable insights into the dynamic relationship between political engagement and socio-economic development. By examining how political apathy impacts policy outputs and socio-economic outcomes, the study can identify key areas where increased civic engagement could lead to more effective governance and improved socio-economic conditions. Furthermore, understanding the feedback mechanisms can help design interventions that break the cycle of apathy and promote active citizen participation.

Methodology

The study adopts a survey research design to comprehensively analyze the influence of political disengagement on local development. The study

focuses on Keffi Local Government Area (LGA) of Nasarawa State, Nigeria, which had a population of 127,572 according to the 2006 National Population Census (National Population Commission, 2006). This study employed a random sampling technique to ensure a representative sample from the total population of 127,572 residents. To determine the sample size, the Taro Yamane (1967) formula is used. This formula is effective for calculating sample sizes from a finite population and is given by:

Where n = sample size

N = total population size

1 is constant

e = the assume error margin or tolerable error which is specified as 5% (0.05) in this study.

$n = 35$ (sample size)

Results and Discussion

Assessing the Impact of Political Apathy on Socio-Economic Development

Table 1: How would you rate the impact of political apathy on economic development in Keffi Local Government Area

Variable	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Very High Impact	102	30
High Impact	96	28
Moderate Impact	85	25
Low Impact	52	15
Total	335	100

Sources: field survey, 2024

Table 1 reveals the perceived impact of political apathy on economic development in Keffi Local Government Area. The majority of respondents, 30%, rated the impact as "Very High," followed by 28% who identified it as "High." A significant portion,

25%, considered the impact "Moderate," while 15% rated it as "Low." The results suggest that political apathy is largely seen as detrimental to economic development, with a combined 58% of respondents recognizing a high or very high impact.

Table 2: In your opinion, how does political apathy affect employment opportunities in Keffi Local Government Area

Variable	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Significantly reduces employment opportunities	125	37
Somewhat reduces employment opportunities	112	33
Has no effect on employment opportunities	70	21
Increases employment opportunities	33	9
Total	335	100

Sources: field survey, 2024

Table 2 reflects the impact of political apathy on employment opportunities in Keffi Local Government Area. A significant portion of respondents (37%) believe that political apathy significantly reduces employment opportunities. Another 33% feel it somewhat reduces opportunities, while 21% think it

has no effect. Only 9% of respondents see political apathy as increasing employment opportunities.

Identifying Factors, Evaluating Influence, and Proposing Strategies

Table 3: What do you believe is the main factor contributing to political apathy in Keffi Local Government Area

Variable	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Lack of trust in political leaders and institutions	175	52
Economic hardship and poverty	50	15
Lack of political awareness and education	89	27
Ineffectiveness of political participation	19	6
Total	335	100

Sources: field survey, 2024

Table 3 from the field survey highlights that economic hardship and poverty are the primary factors contributing to political apathy in Keffi Local Government Area, accounting for 52% of responses. 15% attribute apathy to a lack of political awareness

and education, pointing to insufficient civic engagement efforts. Lastly, 6% cite the ineffectiveness of political participation, reflecting a sense of futility in electoral processes.

Table 4: Which of the following strategies would be most effective in reducing political apathy and improving socio-economic development in Keffi

Variable	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Implementing civic education programs	100	29
Introducing economic empowerment initiatives	50	15
Strengthening political institutions and transparency	130	39
Encouraging community engagement and participation	58	17
Total	335	100

Sources: field survey, 2024

The table presents responses from a field survey on strategies to reduce political apathy and improve socio-economic development in Keffi. Implementing civic education programs was chosen by 29% of respondents, while 15% favored introducing economic empowerment initiatives. Strengthening political institutions and transparency was supported by 39%, making it the most preferred strategy. Encouraging community engagement and participation garnered 17% support. With a total of 335 respondents, these findings suggest that addressing political apathy in Keffi may require a multi-faceted approach, with a

particular focus on enhancing political institutions and transparency, as it had the highest preference.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study arose from the data presentation and its analysis as contained in tables. The data indicates a strong correlation between political apathy and stunted economic development in Keffi LGA. Low voter turnout and minimal civic engagement have been linked to ineffective policy implementation and reduced accountability among local government officials. Empirical studies, such as

those by Akinola and Obayelu (2020), support this finding, demonstrating that political apathy often results in weak governance and poor economic outcomes. In Keffi, the lack of active citizen participation has been associated with stalled infrastructure projects and insufficient investment in local economic initiatives.

The study also found that political apathy negatively impacts the provision of social services. With minimal pressure from an engaged electorate, local authorities are less incentivized to improve healthcare, education, and other essential services. This observation aligns with the work of Anifowose (2018), who noted that active political participation often drives better service delivery and more responsive governance. In Keffi, the underfunding and poor management of social services are partly attributed to the disinterest of the local populace in political processes.

Conclusion

The absence of active citizen involvement has allowed for poor governance, weak accountability, and limited public service delivery, resulting in inadequate infrastructure, insufficient healthcare, and subpar educational facilities. Furthermore, the lack of pressure from the populace has contributed to the entrenchment of corrupt practices and inefficient use of resources, which exacerbates poverty and unemployment.

This disengagement from the political process has also led to a disconnect between the local government and

the needs of the people, as leaders are not held accountable for their performance. As a result, Keffi's socio-economic growth remains stunted, with the community failing to realize its full potential.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. The government, civil society organizations, and educational institutions should intensify efforts to educate the public on the importance of political participation. This can be achieved through regular civic education programs, workshops, and community outreach initiatives that emphasize the connection between active political engagement and socio-economic development.
- ii. To reduce political apathy linked to socio-economic challenges, government and non-governmental organizations should implement targeted poverty alleviation programs. These programs should focus on job creation, skills development, and income generation, particularly for marginalized groups. Addressing economic disparities can enhance political interest and participation among citizens.
- iii. Transparent and accountable political institutions are essential to rebuilding trust between citizens and government. Efforts should be made to reform electoral processes, ensure free and fair elections, and promote transparency in governance. This will help to reduce voter apathy by fostering confidence in the political system.

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