

DETERMINANTS OF VOTER TURNOUT: ANALYSIS OF THE 2015 AND 2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the demographic variables contributing to voter turnout in Calabar Municipality, Nigeria. The study's objectives were to investigate the relationship between age, educational level, and voting in the last two general elections in the country. The study adopted a cross-sectional research design using the multistage sampling technique to select samples. A total of 378 persons participated in the study. Data were analysed using simple percentage and logistics regression. Significant findings include that age has a statistically significant relationship with voter turnout. Also, the level of educational attainment does not have a significant relationship with voter turnout. Other factors negatively influence voter turnout, including electoral violence, long queues on election days, rigging, and the government not caring for the masses. Younger adults must be encouraged to participate in the political process in increasing numbers and for the right reasons. These findings would be helpful to policymakers in stemming the increasing decline in turnout rates toward enhanced socio-political development.

Key words: Democracy; voters; turnout; age; education; politics.

INTRODUCTION

One of the hallmarks of modern democracies is that voters, through the ballot box, perform the critical and highly sensitive role of selecting capable and worthy leaders for their sociopolitical enclave. The electorate performs the crucial role of identifying and voting for credible leaders who should strive for social stability and chart the course for the complex, uncertain future of various aspects of human society. Of course, eligibility for voting is often based on precisely defined criteria. As a result, only pre-qualified persons would usually be expected to perform the vital task of casting the ballot to choose political leaders.

High voter turnout may serve as something other than solid evidence of the acceptability or legitimacy of existing government administration since high turnouts could be fabricated in various ways. For example, people may vote out of compulsion (Solijonov, 2016). However, the study follows the reasoning that low voter turnout, as experienced in Nigeria and elsewhere, is unhealthy for modern democracy, especially as averred by Okaiyeto, Olaogun, and Oluwadele (2021), where the large demography of a population is excluded from the democratic processes.

THERE HAS BEEN AN INCREASED IN DECLINE IN VOTER TURNOUT IN NIGERIA SINCE THE COUNTRY'S RETURN TO CIVIL RULE. FOR EXAMPLE, IT DECLINED FROM 54 PER CENT IN 2011 TO LESS THAN 35 PER CENT IN 2019 (NWAGU, 2016). ADIGU (2020) REPORTING ON NIGERIA'S VOTER TURNOUT REVEALED 43.65 PER CENT AND 34.75 FOR THE 2015 AND 2019 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, RESPECTIVELY. ACCORDING TO OJETUNDE (2019), SEVERAL INTERCONNECTED FACTORS, SUCH AS ACCESS TO POLLING POINTS, PERCEIVED COSTS OF VOTING, THE COMPETITIVENESS OF THE CONTEST, HOUSEHOLD SOCIALIZATION AND ISSUES OF ENFRANCHISEMENT, AND THE THREAT OF VIOLENCE, ARE BELIEVED TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE OBSERVED NOSEDIVE IN TURNOUT RATES. HE REITERATED FURTHER THAT SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES, INCLUDING AGE AND LEVEL OF EDUCATION, ALSO PLAY A ROLE IN DETERMINING VOTER TURNOUT IN ELECTIONS (OJETUNDE, 2019).

The political situation in Nigeria revealed that the youth are apathetic about politics and doubtful about promises made by politicians (Yakubu, 2016). In a study, Olubusoye, Akintande, and Vance (2021) reported that the non-registrants for elections were predominantly the youth, as 30 percent of the youth aged 18-24 made up the total sample of the study but accounted for 51.5 percent of the non-registrants. Adigu (2020) reported that for Cross River

State, the voter turnout was 62.8 per cent in 2011, 40.7 per cent in 2015, and 29.5 per cent for the 2019 elections, showing an increasing decline over the years.

This apathy by the citizens needs to augur better for the country because it clearly shows how increasingly fewer persons are getting to determine the socioeconomic well-being and the fate of the majority of the citizenry. Therefore, voter turnout is critical to national life and has grave implications for several other aspects of socioeconomic development. Indeed, Nwankwo (2019) argued that age and education are among the factors that predict voter turnout. Based on the issues raised, the purpose of the study is to determine the relationship between age and education level on voter turnout in Nigeria's last two general elections. It is deduced from the preceding that although there have been several studies on the influence of demographic factors on voter turnout, studies have yet to be conducted in Cross River State. Such a gap makes this study pertinent. The following hypotheses are developed and tested.

H1: There is no significant association between age and voter turnout in Calabar Municipality.

H2: There is no significant relationship between the level of formal education and voter turnout in Calabar Municipality

LITERATURE REVIEW

Age And Voter Turnout

Generally speaking, people who actually vote are often older. Roberts, Struwig, Gordon, and David (2019) noted that in the 2019 South African national and provincial elections, many young people did not register to vote and that abstaining voters were more inclined to be younger on average. Young adults are identified as the electorate less likely to vote than the elderly (Barber & Holbein, 2022). Bhatti and Hansen (2012) in a study reported that eligible voters aged 20-24 years old had a 44% turnout compared to slightly more than 80% among those eligible in their mid- sixties.

Turnout-age relations have been described mainly as exhibiting curvilinear tendencies. The propensity to vote increases with increasing chronological age, primarily because younger people tend to be more involved in handling job and employment challenges, even as their higher migratory tendencies make it more challenging to cast their votes. Azzolini and Evans (2021) reported a 3.4% higher relative probability of voting ($p < 0.001$) with each additional year of age. In a study, Dim and Asomah (2019) found that age and political participation were positively associated and that older women than younger ones participated more politically. Nwankwo

(2019) reported a 1.259 increase in the likelihood of voting with an increase in age. To Bwalya and Sukumar (2018), compared to people in the younger and middle age groups, those in the older age group are more likely to vote in elections. Global studies have shown a lower turnout rate predisposition for young voters (Schulz-Herzenberg, 2014). They stated further that those who registered to vote were only 6.4 million among the South African 2013 population estimates of 10.9 million eligible voters aged 18 to 29 years, and among those aged 18 and 19, only 33% of those eligible voters registered.

Bhatti, Hansen, and Wass (2012) explained some exceptions to the vastly reported age-turnout trajectory that depicts increasing turnout. According to them, when voting occurs shortly (not more than two years) after enfranchisement, younger voters (particularly first-time voters) experience a higher turnout. However, if voting occurs much later after enfranchisement, then age-turnout relations remain primarily lower among younger persons (approximately 19 - 44 years). It is also argued that lowering the voting age (to say, 16 years) may help boost voter turnout among younger persons. Also, it is easier for people to imbibe interest in politics and voting via civic education and related school activities and then grow up with socially

desirable attitudes (Bhatti Hansen & Wass, 2012).

LEVEL OF EDUCATION AND VOTER TURNOUT

Robust empirical evidence supports the claim that highly educated people are more likely to vote than less educated ones. Persson (2013) reported that education positively correlates with voter turnout at the individual level. To Chukwuma and Okpala (2018), well-educated people tend to vote more than school dropouts, implying that voter turnout is affected by a lack of education and poor financial strength. On his part, Ahlskog (2021) averred that education could serve to increase political participation in general and voter turnout in particular through the production of several goods for the individual. Through social pressure and easy access to political information, educational institutions likely encourage young adults to vote (Bhatti & Hansen, 2012).

Inkinen and Saari (2019) argued that an educational curriculum promotes a sense of political efficacy, like one with a lot more language and civic skills. Thus, for example, an education in the social sciences contributes more to voter turnout and participation in other political activities. In addition, to Dim and Asomah (2019), education affects women's political

involvement. Those with post-secondary and primary education participated more in politics than those without formal education. Similarly, Nwankwo (2019) found that those with a graduate degree are 1.703 times more likely to vote than those with a lower level of education, such as primary or secondary certificate holders in Nsukka council Enugu state, Nigeria.

Fowler (2013) opined that more educated and wealthier citizens vote at higher rates than those of lower socioeconomic status. Nwankwo, Okafor, and Asuoha (2017) also noted that voters with lower education levels were less likely to vote. Supporting this assertion, Persson (2013) submitted that the highly educated have a more likelihood of having networks of persons that are active political participants and are likely to be recruited to participate themselves.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The rational choice theory/ rational action theory was adopted as the theoretical framework for the study. It is a model for explaining and sometimes predicting socioeconomic behavior. Its basic argument is that collective social disposition is the outcome of individual actors; each makes decisions after weighing the options. George Homans is a major proponent of rational choice theory. One of the key assumptions is that in any situation, humans are driven

by self-interest and often guided by what they will benefit from a given situation, which determines their actions, inactions and choices (Homans, 1961).

The theory situates aggregate voter turnout as the sum of individuals' decisions to turn up to vote or not. For such individuals, their decisions are made through conscious and unconscious cost- benefit analyses. For eligible voters to go and cast their vote, they first consider the cost of doing so in terms of the financial implications of commuting. They also consider the amount of time they would have to invest in the process (at the expense of other things that may require their attention) and other implications, such as the risk of possibly being harmed in the event of an outbreak of violence. According to rational choice theory, all of these costs and their implications are what eligible voters would mentally juxtapose against the benefit of having an internal fulfillment of having performed one's civic responsibility of voting during an election.

Accordingly, the individual is most likely to vote where the total (perceived) benefits outweigh the (perceived) costs. Expressed differently, to be sure that people would go out there and cast their votes, cumulative perceived benefits have to outweigh incremental perceived costs. In other words, the difference between cumulative perceived benefits and

cumulative perceived costs must be greater than zero before people can cast their ballots.

In particular reference to age-turnout relations, young adults in a relatively highly transitional period of life seem to have many more factors to contend with, such as the challenges of finding and retaining employment or other sources of livelihood, challenges associated with early years of leaving one's parents/home, other geographical mobility issues and the associated difficulties of resettlement as well as starting a family. When weighed against the benefits of voting (as outlined earlier), these could make franchises less attractive for younger persons.

The costs and benefits are considered 'perceived'; some elements involved in valuing cost and benefit cannot easily be expressed in numbers. For example, the values of the risk of violence and the feeling of fulfillment that comes with performing one's civic duty are challenging to express in numerical terms, just as their appreciation and valuation vary among individuals. The rational choice theory has been criticised, including that humans are hardly genuinely rational. Also, members of society often need to gain perfect knowledge or all the necessary information to base their choices. However, the theory provides a framework for

scholars to understand voter behaviour in terms of turnout better.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a cross-sectional research design using a structured questionnaire. Five electoral wards were randomly selected from the ten political wards in Calabar Municipality, the state capital of Cross River State. It possesses most characteristics (including some high level of political awareness among the populace) that make it ideal for a study on political participation and voter turnout. The systematic sampling technique was then used to select three hundred and seventy-eight respondents for the study.

Data generated for the study were analysed using the simple percentage and the logistic regression analytical tool to test the study's hypotheses.

RESULTS

The result in table 1 shows the distribution of respondents by demographic variables. It indicates that 48.7 per cent of the persons surveyed were male, while 51.3 per cent were female. Also, the majority (75%) of the respondents were aged 18 to 41. Those who are yet to marry and the married (55.3% and 41.5 %) were the majority. On education level, those with a senior secondary certificate, 28%

(equivalent to a high school certificate), and those with a university degree (31.5) respectively were more in number.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by demographic variables (Source: Authors' calculation)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Male	184	48.7
	Female	194	51.3
	Total	378	100
Age	18 - 25	114	30.2
	26 - 33	113	29.9
	34 - 41	58	15.3
	42 - 49	47	12.4
	50 - 57	26	6.9
	58 - 65	11	2.9
	9	2.4	
	Above 65	378	100.0
	Total		
Marital Status	Single	209	55.3
	Married	157	41.5
	Separated	4	1.1
	Divorced	2	0.5
	Widowed	6	1.6
	Total	378	100.0
Level of formal education	Non-formal education	9	2.4
	FLSC	31	8.2
	SSC	106	28.0
	OND/Diploma	26	6.9
	Undergraduate	61	16.1
	HND/B.Sc.	119	31.5
	Master' s degree/Ph.D.	26	6.9
	Total	378	100.0

Source: Field Survey 2022

Table 2 reveals the demographic variables of those who voted or did not vote in the 2015 and 2019 elections. Results show that while 212 respondents voted in 2015, 216 reported voting in 2019, with only a slight increase of 1.9%. Most respondents (80%) aged 50 to 65 and above voted in the 2015 elections, compared to 20% who did not vote. However, there was a reduction as only (76.1%) voted in 2019 in the same age groups. Those aged 18 to 25

were the majority of those who did not vote (54.8%) and (45.1%) in the 2015 and 2019 elections. Those who graduated from the university and the polytechnic (38.2% and 36.6%) were the majority voters. Most of the non-voters for both elections had secondary school certificates (33.1% and 34%) in the 2015 and 2019 elections.

Table 2: Demographic variables and voting patterns in the 2015 and 2019 elections (Source:

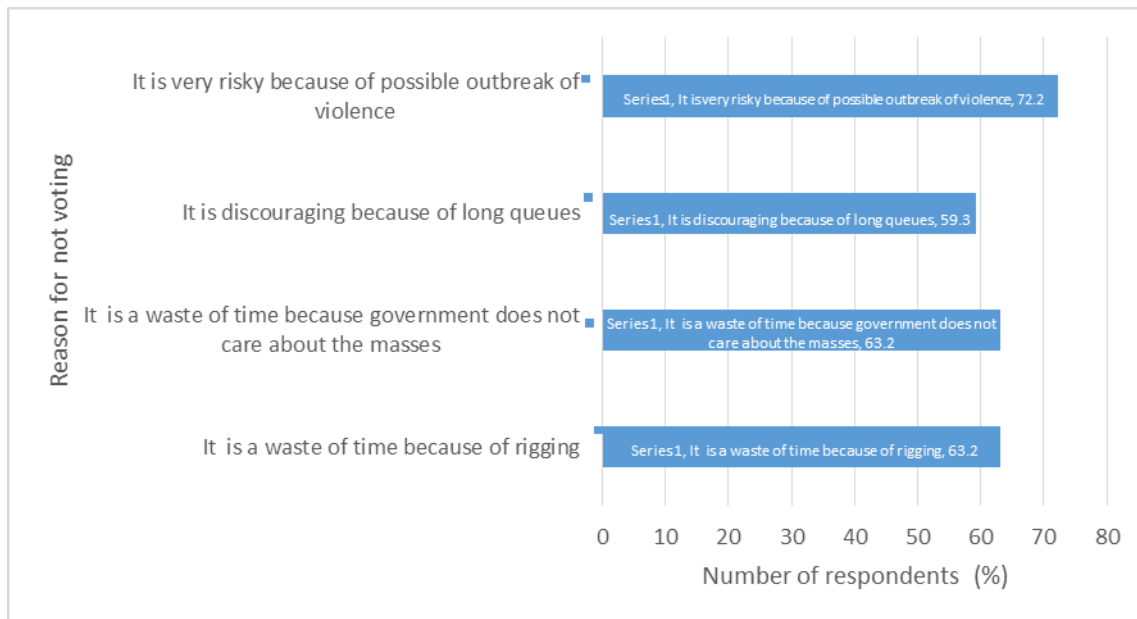
Authors' calculation)

Variables	2015 Election				2019 Election			
	Voted	%	Did not vote	%	Voted	%	Did not vote	%
Age								
18 - 25	23	10.8	91	54.8	41	19.0	73	45.1
26 - 33	77	36.3	36	21.7	70	32.4	43	26.5
34 - 41	39	18.4	19	11.4	36	16.7	22	13.6
42 - 49	36	17.0	11	6.6	34	15.7	13	8.0
50 - 57	20	9.4	6	3.6	18	8.3	8	4.9
58 - 65	10	4.7	1	0.6	9	4.2	2	1.2
65 - 74	7	3.3	2	1.2	8	3.7	1	0.6
Above 75	212	100	166	100	216	100	162	100
TOTAL								
Education level								
NFE	7	3.3	2	1.2	8	3.7	1	0.6
FSLC	18	8.5	13	7.8	18	8.3	13	8.0
SSC	51	24.1	55	33.1	51	23.6	55	34
OND/DIPLOMA	12	5.7	14	8.4	14	6.5	12	7.4
UNDERGRADUATE	25	11.8	36	21.7	30	13.9	31	19.1
HND/BSc	81	38.2	38	22.9	79	36.6	40	24.7
Master' s degree/Ph.D	18	8.5	8	4.8	16	7.4	10	6.2
TOTAL	212	100	166	100	216	100	162	100

Source: Field Survey 2022

Figure 1. Describes why some respondents abstained from voting in the 2019 general elections. For example, the figure shows that 72.2 per cent of respondents reported a fear of an outbreak of violence. 59.3 per

cent, 63.2 per cent, and 63.2 per cent said the queues were discouragingly long, the government does not care about the masses, and some politicians and their cohorts rig elections at the end of the day, respectively.



Source: Field Survey 2022

Figure 1 Distribution of respondents in terms of reasons for not voting (Source: Authors depiction).

The binomial logistic regression was used to test the correlation between age, education level, and voter turnout, and the details are presented in tables 3 and 4. As revealed in table 3, the result of logistic regression showed that age had a statistically significant relationship with voter turnout in 2015 (Wald = 45.575; $p = .000$; Beta = $-.622$; OR = $.537$). The odds of voting are lower for older age groups (the probability of voting is lower for an older person); as a person advances in age to the next / higher cohort, the likelihood of them voting reduces by 0.537 times.

In the case of turnout in 2019, the result in table 4 also showed that age has a statistically significant relationship with

voter turnout (Wald = 24.487; $p = .000$; Beta = $-.395$; OR = $.674$). It means that the odds of voting are lower for older age groups (the probability of voting is lower for older people). By the 2019 election, it has become more unlikely for older persons to cast the ballot; as a person advances in age to the next / higher cohort, the likelihood of them voting reduces by 0.674 times (OR = $.674$).

The result in table 3 showed that the relationship between the level of formal education and voter turnout in 2015 is not statistically significant (Wald = 3.539; $p = .06$; Beta = $-.136$; OR = $.873$). In terms of turnout in 2019, the result in table 4 also showed that the level of education does not have a statistically significant relationship with voter turnout (Wald = 1.647; $p = .199$; Beta = $-.088$; OR = $.916$). The odds of

voting are slightly lower for persons with higher educational attainment.

Table 3: Logistic regression output for turnout in the 2015 election (Source: Authors' calculation)

Variables in the Equation		B	S.E.	Wald	Df	Sig.	Exp (B)
Step 1 ^a	Level of formal education	-.136	.072	3.539	1	.060	.873
	Age	-.622	.092	45.575	1	.000	.537
	Constant	1.853	.400	21.464	1	.000	6.377

Table 4: Logistic regression output for turnout in the 2019 election (Source: Authors' calculation)

Variables in the Equation		B	S.E.	Wald	Df	Sig.	Exp (B)
Step 1 ^a	Level of formal education	-.088	.068	1.647	1	.199	.916
	Age	-.395	.080	24.487	1	.000	.674
	Constant	1.070	.372	8.279	1	.004	2.915

DISCUSSION

The study evaluated the socio-demographic determinants of voter turnout. The study identified that age was statistically significant in the turnout of voters in both the 2015 and 2019 general elections. Our analysis demonstrated that education level was not statistically significant in the voter turnout in both elections. As shown in the result of the study, almost three-quarters of the respondents who did not vote in the most recent general election (2019) attributed it to

fear of an outbreak of violence. More than half said the queues were long, the uncaring attitude of the government, and the elections would be rigged in the end.

Age was significantly associated with voter turnout in the study area. Studies have consistently revealed a significant relationship between age and voting (Agu, Okeke, and Idike, 2013). The study found that older adults were less likely to turn out to vote, which disagreed with the findings by Roberts, Struwig, Gordon, and Davids (2019); Nwankwo (2019), who found that older adults tend to vote more during

elections than younger adults. The finding agrees with Okaiyeto et al. (2021), who found that a slight majority of the youth in their study had voted in an election.

The study revealed that more highly educated persons are less likely to turn out to vote. This finding is at variance with the outcomes of investigations by numerous scholars, including Haime (2017). He argued that education is the best predictor of turnout in the Latin American region. Higher education increases the probability of voting by 12.7% compared to those without education.

However, the fact that the two key findings from this study go against popular literature is not surprising. Like most other parts of Nigeria, the socio-political region where the study was carried out (Calabar Municipality) is highly prone to outbreaks of electoral violence. Time and again, such violence has led to enormous-scale disruption of social equilibrium and loss of lives and property. Besides, brazen acts of election rigging, vote buying, and ballot box snatching are frequent occurrences (Onapajo, 2014). While voter turnout in Nigeria is on a fast decline (Nwagu, 2016), it is also expected that fewer older adults and the highly educated tend to vote.

Most respondents who did not vote in the 2019 elections reported the fear of an outbreak of violence as the reason for not voting. It has been an increasing occurrence

over the years for elections marred by violence in Nigeria. Mac-Ikemenjima (2017) found a weak, negative, statistically significant relationship between voting and violence. The stakes are too high. People hardly would want to risk being physically or emotionally assaulted (or even killed by a stray bullet) during an election that would most likely be a sham, and their votes would not count, as has often been the case in time past.

CONCLUSION

Voter turnout is critical to sustainable democracy and socioeconomic development. Though there is a global decline in turnout figures, the nosedive in Nigeria means that increasingly fewer persons are getting to determine the political and, to a large extent, the economic well being of a much greater majority of the Nigerian populace. It does not augur well for a young and fragile democracy like Nigeria's. As the findings from this study have demonstrated, older adults and persons with higher educational attainment who are supposed to have what it takes to make valuable contributions to the political process and socioeconomic development seem too discouraged and scared off. Because of the frequent breakdown of law and order, the high levels of electoral violence, killings, and blatant manipulation of poll outcomes can hardly contribute

meaningfully to electioneering and voting. However, this is a dangerous trend, and it is necessary to start getting it reversed.

RECOMMENDATION

Younger adults must be encouraged to participate in the political process in increasing numbers and for the right reasons. Thus, persons of voting age and high educational attainment should be encouraged to vote during elections by addressing the challenges that cause most people not to vote.

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