



THE INFLUENCE OF ETHNIC BACKGROUND ON YOUTHS' VOTER EDUCATION AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS VOTING IN SOUTHWEST, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of ethnic background on the perception of youths' voter education and attitude towards voting in Southwest, Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive research design of the survey type. The population comprised all undergraduates in public Universities in Southwest geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The sample was made up of 2400 male and female undergraduates who were selected using multi-stage sampling procedure. A self-designed questionnaire was used for data collection. The reliability coefficient of 0.86 was obtained for the instrument. Data collected were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Ethnic background was found to have moderate level of voting behaviour of youths. Ethnic background was found to have influence on youths voter education towards voting. Also ethnic background was found to have no influence on the perception of youths' attitude towards voting. The study therefore recommended that government should organise voter educational programme in the media such as radio, television and newspaper to educate youths who have not got the opportunity to be involved in the voter education so that the negative attitude of the youths on ethnicity will be corrected. Traditional rulers should educate and encourage the youths of various ethnic groups in their communities to avert ethnic/sectional loyalty during electioneering process and allow national unity among them in the media. These youths will be knowledgeable on due process and electoral credibility during political processes.

Keywords: Attitude, voter education, ethnic background, voting behaviour and youths.

Introduction

Voting in the Nigeria political system formally indicates one's choice or opinion in an election. It is also the means of choosing or electing a leader at a particular time. For sustainable and good governance, political stability and effective voting to take place in any democratic society, citizens need a worthwhile voter education. Ajayi (2011) noted that in a democratic and successful election, youths must know their rights and responsibilities, and must have knowledge and be well informed on how to cast ballots that are legally valid in an election and this appears to be possible through voter education.

In the assertion of Oyatomi (2009), the goal of voter education is to make information available and accessible to all constituents and campaigns should seek to achieve universal coverage of electorates. This effectively requires reaching out to disadvantaged groups as well as mainstream voters. Scholars have different definition of youths based on their fields but basically youths are defined in terms of chronological age. For instance, Adeyi (2011) defined youth as persons aged between 18 and 35. He also revealed that youths constitute about 40 percent of the more than 140 million people of Nigeria and that the total population of youths between 18 and 35 in Nigeria was put at 45.4 million in 2006.



Observations showed that many of the youths in the society seem not to have voter education and this appeared to have contributed a lot to the attitudes of the youths towards voting behaviour.

Youths require adequate voter education to know the values and importance of democracy and these values can easily be transformed to their daily activities. It appears that society in general faces the problem of voter education and this has contributed a lot of problems among the youths in participating in voting process in the country. In Nigeria today, it seems that the youths are now used as tools to foment trouble most especially on campuses so as to destabilise the peace of their institutions as well as the society at large. They are even used by politicians as kingpins or thugs in different electoral offences. The negative attitudes of these youths manifest in behaviours like thuggery, assassination, defacing of posters, chanting of slogans, threat and apathy. These acts are considered to jeopardise national development as well as the credibility of the electioneering processes.

The researcher observed that although the 2015 Nigeria general elections were considered relatively peaceful, however, it appeared to be marked with some irregularities. Independence National Electoral Commission Report (2015) noted that during the general elections, there were reported cases of underage voting, distribution of money at polling centres, manipulation of voters' register, diversion of electoral materials, ballot boxes snatching, unlawful possession of fire arms and other electoral offences which tend to endanger active participation among the youths. These variables have been adduced to influence voting pattern despite Hassan's (2011) argument that youths have been more rational and issue-oriented than earlier accounts. He also opined that for Nigeria to

achieve good and sustainable governance, citizens must possess skills, values and manifest the appropriate behaviours which promote good governance. Voter education helps citizens to make informed judgment about the nature of democratic system, politics, government and such knowledge could promote the understanding of the nature and importance of democratic society and the art of good governance.

Egwu (2011), opined that voting behaviour entails an expression for one party, candidate or issue against the other in political system and political institution of a given society. Voting behaviour of the youths in Southwest, Nigeria contributes immensely to the violence / difference during electoral processes. Competition between or among the elites precipitate ethnic conflict under specific condition which arise from the broader political environment rather than from differences in the cultural values of ethnic groups in question. In the assertion of Austin (2014), through ethnicity youths seem to exhibit voting behaviour such as group identity, parochial orientation, group pride and beliefs. It is a universal phenomenon that one often judges people of other ethnic groups subjectively using one's own ethnic values or expectation as the standard for assessing others. Diamond (2008), posited that youths voting behaviour is characterized by political violence, political apathy, and political silence during electoral processes, these behaviours seem to jeopardise political development in Southwest, Nigeria. These behaviours manifest among the youths as a result of lack of voter education.

In the contribution of Oyeneye (2014) In Southwest, Nigeria the expectation is that youths should have voter education with personal qualities in a supportive and conducive environment and to exhibit appropriate behaviour during electoral processes. Many of



the youths observe the behaviour of their political leaders /mentor and thereby result in altering of their behaviour before, during and post electoral process. Youths who have got voter education would know the danger of political violence, political apathy and political silence. Youths hence know the importance of voting and thereby have behavioural and attitudinal changes.

Ethnicity is derived from the word ethnic which has been conceptualized by various scholars. For example, Agagu and Omotoso (2005) defined ethnicity as "the consciousness of belonging to, identifying with and being loyal to a social group distinguishing by shared cultural traditions, a common language, in-group sentiments and self-identity. Nwachukwu, Austin and Nwosu (2014) view the term as referring to the strife between groups in the course of which they stress for their identity and exclusiveness. The notion implies a conflictual and competitive relationship between ethnic groups. Austin (2014) opined that ethnicity arises when two or more ethnic groups come together in one political union or society usually when two or more ethnic groups interact ethnocentrism is exhibited by each of them. Ethnocentrism are limited to beliefs, group identity, parochial orientation and group pride.

The result of this is that youths lack skills, knowledge and information about voter education and these might have quenched their thirst for group pride and group loyalty which have been affecting them. Competition between or among the youths when they come in contact arising from the broader political environment rather than differences in cultural values of ethnic groups in question. Through voter education, youths of different social groups are expected to know the values, attitudes, and importance of democracy that will make them more enlightened about national integration, common good and the high

rate of conflicts among the social groups of youths.

In the opinion of Idahosa and Otoghile (2010), the Nigeria polity is one that has been plagued by many impediments to its political development. Ethnicity has been identified as one of the major factors militating against the evolution of the truly modern and democratic nation where the interest, wellbeing and the rights of the ethnic, racial, religious, geographical, social and economic background of the individual. Kolawole (2008) posited that other major destructive incidences on the trail of ethnicity in Nigeria are the Jos riots of 1945, the kano riot of 1953, the Tiv uprising of between 1959 to 1960 and 1964. The ethnic massacres within the army in the North which preceded the civil war in 1967 and the civil war which lasted for 30 months. Ethnicity has in the past threatened the corporate existence of the nation as various ethnic groups have at one time or the other expressed the desire to secede from the federation.

In the views of Austin (2014), influence of the elites on the electoral choice of voters can also be said to be less in the more recent elections as the time lapse between republic seemed to have given the people useful political education beside the general increase in the literacy rate of the people. Hence the fewer the choice of political parties, the less ethnically inclined are the electorates.

Statement of the problem

In any democratic society, voting is a means through which people participate in the political system. It has been observed that many of the youths refuse to vote due to ignorance, and when they do, their votes are not casted appropriately. Observation further shows that election turnout seems to be in decline in Southwest, Nigeria due to poor voter education and negative attitude of the youths towards voting behaviour.



The youths' attitude seems to be characterized by intolerance, thuggery, bitterness, apathy and indolence. Hence the ingredients of democracy have not been able to thrive after many years of independence in Southwest Nigeria. Youths' negative attitude towards voting could also be attributed to the use of political touts to foment trouble during elections. The consequence of this is that the candidates elected may likely be unaccountable, inaccessible, irresponsible and unresponsive to the yearnings and aspiration of the people. Without adequate voter education knowledge, youths may cast their vote along ethnic and party lines with no reference to rationality. It seems that youths are fond in the attitudes of conversion of cultural differences/ ethnicity before, during, after electoral process. These tend to have contributed to the electoral problems faced by these youths. It seems that the youths are ignorant of all these as it manifest in their attitudes and behaviours during voting in elections. Therefore, this study investigated the influence of ethnic background on the perception of youths' voter education and their attitude towards voting in Southwest, Nigeria.

Purpose of study

It investigated the influence of ethnic background on youths voter education. It also explored the influence of ethnic background on youths' attitude towards voting.

Research Questions

The following research questions have been raised in the study:

1. What is the level of youths' voting behaviour in Southwest, Nigeria?
2. What is the level of voter education among the youths in Southwest, Nigeria?
3. What is the attitude of youths towards voting in Southwest, Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses have been formulated in the study:

1. Ethnic background has no significant influence on of youths' voter education.
2. Ethnic background has no significant influence on youths' attitude towards voting.

Research Method

The study adopted a descriptive research design of the survey type. The population of the study comprised all undergraduates in all public Universities in Southwest, geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The sample consisted of 2400 undergraduates in Southwest, Nigeria. They comprised 1041 male and 1359 female undergraduates drawn from federal and state Universities through a multistage sampling procedure. In stage one, three states were selected out of the six states in Southwest geopolitical zone of Nigeria, these selected states are Ondo, Ekiti and Lagos states using simple random sampling technique. In stage two, simple random sampling technique was used to select one federal University and one state University from each state chosen. In third stage, purposive sampling technique was used to select 400 undergraduates of the voting age in 300 level and above in each University selected from the three states. This make a total of 800 undergraduates in 2 Universities selected in each state, thereby making the overall total of 2400 students used for the study. A self-designed instrument used for this study was validated by experts in the related field. A trial testing was carried out on 25 youths from University not included the sample. The instrument was done twice on the respondents within an interval of two weeks. The reliability of the two scores was obtained and correlated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis and the coefficient was 0.86 which was found to be very reliable. Data collected for the study were analysed



using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The research questions were answered by using descriptive statistics such as frequency count, percentage scores, mean and standard deviation. Hypothesis one and two were tested using Analysis of variance.

Result

Question 1: What is the level of youths' voting behaviour in Southwestern Nigeria?

In answering the question, respondents' scores in frequency counts, percentages, mean and standard deviation were calculated. To determine the level of youths' voting behaviour (low, moderate and high), the low level of youths' voting behaviour was determined by subtracting the standard deviation from the mean score ($67.43 - 6.59 = 60.84$). The moderate level was determined by the mean score (67.43) while the high level was determined by adding the mean score and standard deviation ($67.43 + 6.59 = 74.02$). Therefore, low level of youths' voting behaviour starts from 25.0 to 60.84, the moderate level start from 60.85 to 74.01 and the high level from 74.02 - 100.0. The level of youths' voting behaviour is presented in table 3 and figure 3.

Table 1: Level of Youths' Voting Behaviour

Levels of youths' voting behaviour	Frequency	Percentage
Low (25.0 - 60.84)	549	22.9
Moderate (60.85 - 74.01)	1803	75.1
High (74.02 - 100.0)	48	2.0
Total	2400	100

Table 1 revealed the levels of youths' voting behaviour. The result showed that out of 2400 respondents, 549 representing 22.9 percent of the respondents agreed that low level of voting behaviour. Those who had moderate level of voting behaviour

were 1803 representing 75.1 percent while 48 representing 2.0 percent had high level of voting behaviour. This showed the level of youths' voting behaviour was moderate.

Research Question 2: What is the level of voter education among the youths in Southwest Nigeria?

In answering the question, the mean score, percentage and frequency count were used to illustrate the responses to items 1 - 25 in section B of the questionnaire. To determine the level of voter education in Southwest, Nigeria (Low, Moderate and High), the low level of voter education was determined by subtracting the standard deviation score from the mean score ($81.14 - 9.61 = 79.53$). The moderate level of voter education was determined by the mean score of the responses on youth voter education (89.14) while the high level of voter education was determined by adding the mean score and the standard deviation score of the responses on youths' voter education ($89.14 + 9.61 = 98.75$). Therefore, low level of voter education starts from 25 - 79.53; the moderate level starts from 79.54 - 98.74 and the high level of voter education is from 98.75 - 100.

Table 2: Level of Voter Education in Southwestern Nigeria

Level	Frequency	Percentage
Low (25 - 79.53)	168	7.00
Moderate (79.54 - 98.74)	453	18.88
High (98.75 - 100)	1779	74.12
Total	2400	100

Table 2 revealed the levels of voter education. The result showed that out of 2400 sampled students, 168 representing 7 per cent had low level. Those who had moderate level were 453 representing 18.88 per cent while those with high level were 1779 representing 74.12 percent. This showed that the level of voter education was very high.

Question 3: What is the attitude of youths towards voting in Southwest, Nigeria?



In analysing the question, the mean scores, percentage and frequency count were used to illustrate the responses to items 1 - 25 in section C of the questionnaire. The attitude of youths towards voting in Southwest, Nigeria (negative and positive), were determined as follows: The positive and negative attitudes of youths towards voting were determined by the mean score. The positive attitude fell above the mean score (65.06) while the negative attitude of youths towards voting fell below the mean score (65.06). Therefore, negative attitude of youths towards voting starts from 25.00 - 65.05 while the positive attitude of youths towards voting is from 65.06 - 100

Table 3: Youths' Attitude Towards Voting in Southwest, Nigeria

Attitude	Frequency	Percentage
Negative	467	19.46

(25.00 - 65.05)	-	
Positive	1933	80.54
(65.06 - 100)	-	
Total	2400	100

Table 3 revealed the attitude of youths' towards voting. The result revealed that out of 2400 sampled students, 467 representing 19.46 percent had negative attitude towards voting. Those who had positive attitude towards voting were 1933 representing 80.54 percent. This showed that most youths have positive attitude towards voting.

Hypothesis 1: Ethnic background has no significant influence on youths' voter education.

Table 4: 2-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for Influence of Ethnic Background on Youths' Voter Education

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	213850.191 ^a	11	19440.926	6181.923	.000
Intercept	2002435.025	1	2002435.025	636744.251	.000
Level	65938.804	2	32969.402	10483.774	.000
Ethnicity	45.375	3	15.125	4.810	.002
Level * Ethnicity	99.392	6	16.565	5.268	.000
Error	7509.789	2388	3.145		
Total	1.929E7	2400			
Corrected Total	221359.980	2399			

a. R Squared = .966 (Adjusted R Squared = .966)

The result presented in Table 4 showed that the F-cal value of 5.268 is significant at 0.05 level of significance because the P value of $0.00 < 0.05$. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that ethnic

background has significant influence on of youths' voter education.

Hypothesis 2: Ethnic background has no significant influence on youths' attitude towards voting.

Table 5: 2-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for Influence of Ethnic Background on of Youths' Attitude towards Voting

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	182594.070 ^a	6	30432.345	3700.353	.000
Intercept	1325557.216	1	1325557.216	161178.155	.000
Attitude	50126.116	1	50126.116	6094.973	.000
Ethnic Background	5.217	3	1.739	.211	.889
Attitude * Ethnic	2.072	2	1.036	.126	.882
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Error	19680.449	2393	8.224
Total	1.036E7	2400	
Corrected Total	202274.518	2399	

a. R Squared = .903 (Adjusted R Squared = .902)

From Table 5, the F-cal value of 0.126 is not significant at 0.05 level of significance because the P value of $0.882 > 0.05$. Hence, the null hypothesis is not rejected, showing that ethnic background has no significant influence on the youths' attitude and towards voting. This implies that ethnic background did not influence the youths' attitude towards voting.

Discussion

The study revealed that the level of voter education among the youths is very high. In view of this, youth adequate civic knowledge as the information, ideas, facts and political concepts are directly acquired from schools and other agents of socialisation like, religious institution, media, peer group and family. Also the civic engagements or practices of the citizens are determined by their political attitudes and practices are interrelated and interdependent. This has given the youths the opportunity to have adequate voter education and relatively affect their attitudes towards voting.

Aliyu (2010) supported this claim by concluding that there is high level of civic and political awareness among youths and stressed that youths who are in school have knowledge of political concepts than those that are not in school. From the study, youths exhibit ethnocentrism, they believe in group identity, group pride, group loyalty among social groups in Southwest, Nigeria. Hence youths use ethnic sentiments to mobilise support in their personal struggles for political and economic gains. The finding corroborates that of Idahosa and Otoghile (2010) who observed that ethnicity is a major factor influencing the youths' attitude towards voting. They went further to say ethnicity is militating against the evolution of the truly modern and

democratic nation where the interest, well-being and the rights of the citizens are protected.

The finding also contradicts that of Kolawole (2008) who cited examples of how ethnicity influences the attitude towards voting with the general election crisis of 1964 and the Western Region election crisis of 1965 which led to the imposition of a state of emergency and eventually military incursion into politics. Also, the ethnic massacres within the army in the North which preceded the civil war in 1967 and threatened the corporate existence of the nation as various ethnic groups have at one time or the other expressed the desire to secede from the federation. The finding on ethnic influence on voter's education contradicted that of Austin (2014) who opined that ethnic influence on the voter education can be said to be less in the more recent elections as several agencies seemed to have given the people useful political education beside the general increase in the literacy rate of the people. It was also observed that the fewer the choice of political parties, the less ethnically inclined are the electorates.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is concluded from the findings of this study that the level of voter education among the youths in the Southwest, Nigeria was very high. The youths' voter education and attitude towards voting are related. The level of youths voting behaviour was moderate. Ethnic background has influence on youths' voter education but has no influence on youths attitude towards voting. The level of youth voting behaviour was also moderate. Youths are actively participating in electoral processes. They vote to elect credible leaders.



In view of the findings, the following recommendations were made:

Government should organize voter educational programme in the media, such as radio, television and newspapers to educate youths who have not got the opportunity to be involved in the voter education programme on voting exercise. These youths will be knowledgeable on due process and electoral credibility during political processes.

Traditional rulers should educate and encourage the youths of various ethnic groups in their communities to avert ethnicity/sectional loyalty during electioneering process and allow national unity among them in the society.

Independent National Electoral Commission should organize conference for youths of different ethnic groups on voting exercise to shun ethnic competition for power which has been resulting in bloodletting in various part of Southwest, Nigeria.

National Orientation Agency should organize seminar for youths base one ethnicity to enlighten them on how to improve upon their voting behaviour during electioneering process to correct and divert from attitude such as ethnic sentiments to mobilise support in their personal struggles for political and economic gains.

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