

Youth Perception on the Importance of Voting During Elections in Nigeria

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Abstract

Voting apathy among Nigerian youth had been a significant issue in Nigeria's fledgling democracy. Does that mean that elections do not seem to be important among the youth? Thus, this study evaluates youth perception of voting's importance during elections during the 2018 Ekiti gubernatorial elections. The study sampled the opinion of 1369 youth from 18 to 35 years across the three senatorial districts of the state. Findings show that an overwhelming majority (78.1%) of the respondents see the 2018 Ekiti governorship election as important. This shows that the youth are very interested in the coming Election as 69.7% agreed they would vote during the 2018 Ekiti governorship election. The youths (83.3%) know that their vote matters, even as they agreed (74.8%) voting in Election is vital to Democracy. Therefore, the level of voting signals youth's role in the democratic process can never be overemphasized. Therefore, it is recommended that youths not stop at voting but also contest for elective positions and be active in the democratic process during and after elections.

Keywords: Youth; Election; Voting, Democracy, and Nigeria

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Introduction

Democracy that has its large demography primarily excluded from its process will surely not be healthy. There is a global outcry that the youth are largely left out in the electoral process caused by voting or participatory apathy. Despite the massive contribution by youths in the emergence of the current political dispensation, by extension, the process of Democracy as well as their significant percentage in Nigeria population (Abba & Imam, 2016), views suggests that the Nigeria youth records an almost total exclusion in political engagements as well as a non-impression of the positive impact of the socio-economic policies of the present dispensation (National Youth Colloquium, 2016; Abba & Imam, 2016).

Democracy is a political system characterized by regular and free elections in which politicians organized into political parties; they compete for power by right of all adults' virtue to vote and guarantee a range of political and civil rights (Odo, 2015). The return of Nigeria to Democracy in 1999 usher in tremendous hope, as (Ikpeaze 2013) noted that the public had reasonable anticipation of a better society.

The idea of good Democracy, which (Morlino, 2002) entails 'freedom and equality'; periodic free, fair, and competitive elections have not yet been attained in Nigeria 20 years of uninterrupted democratic journey (Okaiyeto, 2017). Okaiyeto (2017) posits that the shortfall in democratic consolidation in Nigeria cannot be disconnected from the historical political, social, and economic realities that define the Nigerian state since it was independent in 1960.

Democracy in Nigeria has not provided its dividends to the people envisioned. Democracy has failed to bring good governance in Nigeria (Omoleke & Olaiya, 2015). The election period is characterized by rigging, thuggery, violence, and money politics. These are anathema to democratic consolidation. Today, Nigeria's Democracy is noted for its ethnic chauvinism in which merit is being sacrificed at the altar of mediocre. Thus, Majekodunmi (2012) note that Nigerian Democracy is characterized by intimidation, oppression, and subordination is in most part a product of the general culture which harbours bigotry and nepotism. Democracy involves values like "freedom of association, citizen participation in decision-making and non-arbitrary rule, tolerance of opposing views, respect for law and order, free and fair elections, leadership transparency, etc." that is lacking in Nigeria.

Thus, good governance can only be realistic in Nigeria when the elites have decided to embrace a real democratic state's creed.

Since there is a conscious agitation and or advocacy for youth engagement recorded in social media at diverse corners, this function as a pointer in this clime. Recently, the occurring paradigm is not political apathy but how youth political disengagement can be diminished. However, the 2017 NOI Polls shows that 64% of Nigerians would prefer to vote for presidential candidates between 40 and 50 years, while 15% will go for ages 51 and 60. This paints an inverted picture of the perceived increasing discourse, commentary, and campaign in the media for youth participation and a specific vote and is voted for during elections. Against this backdrop, this study answers the following questions: 1). How important is voting during elections among the youth? 2) What is the level of youth vote during Ekiti Governorship Elections? 3) What is the level of youth interest in elections?

Importance of Voting During Elections

Democracy requires the active participation of citizens, which can be seen through voting during elections. Political science research on citizens' engagement in politics has conventionally focused on electoral participation, but participation is beyond voting in contemporary realities even though it is imperative. Therefore, Gustafsson (2014) defines political participation as any activities by private citizens directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or their actions. Voting during the Election plays a crucial role to signify active participation. Participation was understood as "actions of private citizens by which they seek to influence or support government and politics" or as "all voluntary activities by individual citizens intended to influence either directly or indirectly political choices at various levels of the political system" (Ekman and Amna 2009, p.6).

Huntington & Nelson (1976) view political participation as activity by private citizens designed to influence government decision-making. It is the citizen that votes during the Election that will know the importance of participation. Verba *et al.* (1995) describe political participation only as an activity with the intent or effect of influencing government action either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies.

Voting as a form of political participation takes place during election time majorly. However, participation at election time does not necessarily mean the most effective means of citizen influence. Though elections are a powerful means of citizen control over government officials, they are rather blunt instruments of control. For the individual or groups of citizens, the most important political activities maybe those in the between-elections period, when citizens try to influence government decisions concerning specific problems that concern them. This way of thinking about political participation at least implicitly opened for analyses of activities that included not only voting behaviours but also, e.g., demonstrations, strikes, boycotts, and other forms of protest behaviours (Ekman & Amna, 2009).

Putnam's (2000) argument that political participation is declining due to a reduction in civic engagement (both political and non-political) implies negative consequences for a representative democracy's health. Voting is critical in determining how effective and robust the democratic process will be. As such, the campaign against voter apathy should be a significant step for participatory Democracy, which is mainly regarded worldwide as a better system to guarantee good governance.

Youth and Participatory Democracy

Democracy, as established, presupposes the participation of the people, even in its representative tendencies. Its most popular conceptualization remains the Abraham Lincoln hue of, the government of the people, for the people, and by the people (Nnenna, 2014). Essentially, Democracy strongly features, amongst many, the participation of the people irrespective of demographic and socio-cultural factors in social, economic, and political activities (Nnenna, 2014). Therefore, the concept is summated as a people-oriented/ driven system (Jaja, 2005). Examining youth, in perspective, dictates that current trends demonstrate that younger generations' political involvement and participation is declining (Henn & Foard, 2011). Thus, highlighting its danger to Democracy, Tamanna (2015) posits, "This decreasing level of youth participation in politics not only endangers the democratic representativeness (quality of leadership) of today but also jeopardizes the democracy of tomorrow" (Tamanna, 2015 p. 65).

Consequently, the perceived decline of young people in politics has led, over time, governments, the media, industry giants, and researchers' investigation into the complexion of youth and political engagement (Quintelier,

2007). Social media imputes in the democratic process hold enormous hope to bring back youth into political participation.

Theoretical Framework

The cognitive engagement theory, which is the advance of cognitive mobilization theory, talks about how individuals are willing and able to learn about politics, which eventually leads to participation (Abdulrauf, Hamid & Ishak, 2015). It involves the amount of efforts youths are willing to invest in seeking to participate in politics and how long they persist (Charles, 2010).

Ronald F. Inglehart propounded cognitive Engagement Theory in 1977, which was Cognitive Mobilization Theory (Abdulrauf *et al.* 2015)- basically meant political participation is affected by better-educated youths who have increased access to information. Here, it enunciates the individual's education, access to information, political knowledge, political interest, and policy satisfaction in the polity.

The perspective of voting during elections embodies two different trends. First is the decrease in the cost of acquiring information; second, the increase in youth's ability to process political information enhances participation. This means that youths will have more political resources to deal with political issues and understand how Democracy works in their society when they form part of the voting strength. Consequently, using CET has helped to clarify differing results as it contains variables such as access to political information on, political knowledge, voting, political interest, and policy satisfaction, which better explains the concept of youth voting as a form of political participation during elections, hence decreasing the inconsistencies experienced in previous research (Abdulrauf, *et al.* 2015).

Methodology

This study surveyed youth in Ekiti state during the 2018 governorship election. However, due to the study's peculiarity as it focuses on the perceptions of 1369 youths across the three senatorial districts of Ekiti state that fall within the age bracket of 18-35.

The Purposive sampling method was employed in this research. Since this study's focus is strictly the perceptions of youth and cognizance of the study's scope. The researchers selected the study sample based on whether they fit into the 'criteria.' Hence, this criterion suggests youths within the age bracket of 18-35 years were sampled and administered questionnaires (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). However, 1369 youths who fall into the category of 18-35 adequately filled and returned the questionnaire.

Findings

SPSS version 21.0 was used for the analysis. The demography data shows that 40.2% of the respondents are males, while 59.8% are females. Since the study's focus is youth, the study categorized the selection of age between three parameters. Consequently, the majority (61.6%) of the respondents fall within the age bracket of 18-22. However, 26.9% of respondents are within the age range of 23-28, while 11.5% are between 29-35 years of age.

Table 1: Have you ever voted?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	676	49.4%
No	693	50.6%
Total	1369	100%

Table 2: Is Politics Important to you?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	901	65.8%
No	468	34.2%
Total	1369	100%

Table 3: Are you a member of any Political Party?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	513	37.5%
No	856	62.5%
Total	1369	100%

Table 4: Are you a Card carrier of any Political Party?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	543	37.0%
No	826	63.0%
Total	1369	100%

Table 5: Is the Ekiti Governorship Election Important to you?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	1069	78.1%
No	300	21.9%
Total	1369	100%

Table 6: Are you voting in the 2018 Governorship Election?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	954	69.7%
No	415	30.3%
Total	1369	100%

Table 7: Does your Vote matters in the 2018 Ekiti Election?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	1140	83.3%
No	229	16.7%
Total	1369	100%

Table 8: Are you interested in who wins at the end of the Election?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	1024	74.8%
No	345	25.2%
Total	1369	100%

Table 9: Do you agree that Voting in Elections is important to Democracy?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	1024	74.8%
No	345	25.2%
Total	1369	100%

Discussion

The findings show that a slight (50.6%) majority of respondents agreed that they have ever voted during elections. Therefore, many youths have seen the need to participate in voting, as this study found. Similarly, the study shows that the majority (65.8%) of the respondents attest that politics is important to them. These findings have strengthened the view that youth have begun to understand the importance of picking interest in the political process. As such, 37.5% of the respondents are members of a political party, while 37% are registered card carrier of a political party.

An overwhelming majority (78.1%) of the respondents see the 2018 Ekiti governorship election as important. This shows that the youth are very interested in the coming Election as 69.7% agreed they would vote during the 2018 Ekiti governorship election. The youths (83.3%) know that their vote matters, even as they agreed (74.8%) voting in Election is vital to Democracy.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that youths have picked interest in the democratic process as they have seen the importance of voting during elections. Youths voting during elections support their agitation for political or governance inclusion. Therefore, the level of voting signals youth's role in the democratic process can never be overemphasized. Therefore, it is recommended that youths not stop at voting but also contest for elective positions and be active in the democratic process during and after elections.

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