
THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL STUDIES ON THE
VOTING BEHAVIOUR OF NIGERIANS FOR DEMOCRATIC
SUSTENANCE AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT OF
NIGERIA

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Abstract

Elections in democracy help to promote representation of popular will and to secure legitimacy of the political system. However, there is an indicative evidence of political apathy. To a large extent, citizens' relation to political action as well as institutional patterns such as the party affiliation, communication process and their impacts on elections constitute major elements in the electoral process. This paper is therefore concerned about political participation and voters' behaviour in a democratic environment characterized by several forces on the minds of the voters. The extent to which these forces affect citizens' participation and voters' behaviour in Nigeria is too complex and with no doubt requires education. It was then recommended among other things that through Social Studies, civic education should be taught at the primary and secondary school levels; also, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) needs to be restructured and revitalized to bring about high level of orderliness, transparency and accountability, there should be free, fair credible election which will enable voters build confidence

and see election as an agent of change.

Keywords: Democratic Sustenance, Election, Political Development, Political Participation, Social Studies, Voting Behaviour

Introduction

Elections are the basic thrust of representative government the world over. Yusuf (2015) opined that in political theory, the authority of the government in democracy is derived solely from the consent of the governed. The method through which that consent is translated into governmental authority is the regular conduct of elections which is not a day activity. Though not in all cases, election is the central hub of democratic political system to the extent that one can argue that 'No election, no democracy'. It is therefore the ethical foundation of democracy as it represents the opinion of the majority. Nelson (2001), notes that the goal of elections is to have an open and competitive process which allows voters to exercise their civic rights in choosing their representatives.

This shows clearly that the results of any good (democratic) elections should accurately reflect the will of the electorate. Fru (2005) opines that for free, fair and equitable elections to be achieved, certain acceptable elements must be in place and these include: an equitable and fair electoral framework, a professional, neutral and transparent election administration, a generally acceptable code of ethical behaviour in political and press freedom, accountability of all participants, integrity safeguard mechanism and the enforcement of the election laws and other relevant laws.

The situation of Nigeria's elections has been that of a complete departure from these requirements/elements of free and fair elections. The absence of credible elections in Nigeria, therefore, derived from the failure to abide by these standard variables governing electoral practice generally. One major problem with Nigeria's election is the voting behaviour of the citizens. The political participation of people is nothing to write home about. In liberal democratic theory, an election is a viable mechanism for consummating representative government, and voting is the main

form of political participation in democratic societies. The study of voting behaviour is a highly specialized sub-field in political and social sciences.

There is no gainsaying the fact that credible elections constitute a major factor in democracy, democratization and good governance globally. Election in democracy helps to promote representation of popular will and to secure legitimacy of the political system. However, there is an indicative evidence of the decline in voters' electoral participation, the lack of psychological involvement in public affairs, emotional detachment from civic obligations, and a somewhat reserved attitude towards political activity even at the global level. It is imperative therefore to understand the sources and character of political abstention. Voter electoral behaviour, a subset of political behaviour, has thus emerged as a major problem in mature and emerging democracies, settled and volatile societies, large and thriving economies, as well as small and large ones.

Why do people vote? Why do they not vote? These are pertinent questions. There has been much concern in the past few years that the Nigerian citizens are disengaging from the political process, as shown by the continuing decline in voter turnouts at all levels of elections. This leads to serious questions of legitimacy. If fewer than half of all eligible voters vote and the winning candidate receives a little bit above 50% of the votes, what can we say about mandates and about the power to govern? Are non-voters completely disengaged, or simply engaged in other kinds of political activities that they find more satisfying and more likely to affect their lives?

In a country trying to consolidate democracy after a long history of authoritarian military rule, strategies for mobilizing people for popular participation and effective engagement in the electoral process have to be well-conceptualized and carefully designed. In doing this, peoples' perceptions and attitudes have to be studied, analysed, understood and taken into consideration. In any case, liberal democracy is in crisis in many countries, developed and developing (Adejumobi. 2002). Political participation and development are both topical and very complementary to each

other as people-centred concept. Power, which is the element of democracy or political participation, is a strategic driver of development because development has ever remained a product of a number of interactions that are ideological with commitment and influence (Suberu, Akinyoola & Amusat, 2016). As development is seen as an indicator of democratic governance, so is democratic power seen as vital requirement for development. Therefore, to get meaningful development in the society, there should be active and significant participation of the citizens and the commitment of the government.

In this regard, education will help the people to understand the ills of the society and to develop a vision of a better world hinged on the principles of social justice, religious tolerance, improved human rights, poverty alleviation/reduction, and abhorrence of corruption in the society. Students are expected to acquire education which will enable them function effectively in a democratic society. Such education is expected to equip them intellectually to be able to reflect on their own actions and how such actions affect their immediate neighbours; seek to understand their problems and be able to analyse them with a view to relating them to the problems of others; attempt to understand their cultural backgrounds and those of their immediate neighbours, and be able to integrate the cultural values in these different backgrounds for the purpose of sustainable development (Ogundiran, Ogunjimi & Olayiwola, 2014). On this basis, this paper explores the concepts of political development, voters' behaviour, political participation and the impact of Social Studies education on the sustenance of democracy in Nigeria.

Conceptualizing Political Development

Development entails the desirable transformation of the total well-being of the people of a society by exploiting their socio-cultural environments. Rodney (1972) asserts that development is the qualitative transformation of the socio-economic, political and ideological structures of institutions from their rudimentary forms to refined form. Ogunyinka (2006) defines development as the ability of human-beings and their societies to solve problems of

hunger, disease, natural disaster, ignorance, political instability, unemployment, etc. The development process generally refers to the whole gamut of planned and unplanned system of growth and change in the economic, political, social and technological structures of a society which is the ultimate goal of any government.

No nation can rise above the quality of her political leaders. It is no secret that democracy is the best form of government. The worse democratic government is better than the best dictatorship. In a loose or general sense, political development is a very vague as well as very comprehensive term that encompasses things like consolidation of democratic system, political stability or orderly change, nation building and state building, political modernisation, legal development, political mobilisation and emancipation, and above all, anything that has its place in the multi-dimensional development of a country. Ultimately, political development can be defined as an increase in national political unity and an increase in political participation.

Voting Behaviour and Political Participation

Voting behaviour is a form of electoral behaviour which indicates the way different people tend to vote. Understanding voters' behaviour can explain how and why decisions are made to vote or not to vote. The most important socio-economic factor affecting voters' turnout is education. The more educated a person is, the more likely he or she is to vote, even controlling for other factors that are closely associated with educational level, such as income and class. Voting is a way of participating in a democracy. According to American political scientist, Larry Diamond, democracy consists of four key elements: a political system for choosing and replacing the government through free and fair elections; the active participation of the people as citizens in politics and civic life; protection of the human rights of all citizens; a rule of law in which the laws and procedures apply equally to all citizens.

Political participation can be described in simple term as the involvement of citizens of a country in the politics of their country or society. Political participation can as well be referred to as the getting involved or taking part in activities that have to do with

politics or that discuss the happenings of the government. According to George-Genyi (2018), the history of political participation in more than half a century of Nigeria's existence as a sovereign nation-state is a chronicle of political uncertainties. Since its independence in 1960, Nigeria has been struggling to install a viable and durable democracy. He further opines that participation in elections in Nigeria is characterised by machine politics which involves the parceling out of parts of the State, including territories to individuals, usually under the leadership of one or two notables.

Without political participation, the need for elections and voting will not come up and there will be no democracy and democratic system. Uhlaner (2001) perceives political participation as political engagement. Riley, Griffin and Morey (2010) agree that political participation is a set of rights and duties that involve formally organized civic and political activities. Elections and voting are indispensable aspects of political engagement. The most common form of political participation is exercising the right to vote in election (Flanigan & Zingale, 1998). Studies in political behaviour have found out to a large extent the importance of political participation in democratic polity. Powell (1992) recognizes that participation by citizens in competitive elections is a distinctive characteristic of democratic politics, putting in mind that substantial citizens' involvement in meaningful elections both reflects and encourages a sense of democratic legitimacy that will help to curtail violence and encourage regular competition.

Political participation is therefore a tool for managing political conflict. It is a critical activity that may help to play the essential role in enforcing elites to respond to other forms of citizens' involvement (Diamond, 2018). Engagement in public affairs serves as an important link between the government and the governed. It affords citizens in a democracy an opportunity to communicate information to government officials about their concerns and preferences and to put pressure on them to respond (Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995). Political participation is viewed as a source of interaction with the government as it serves as a platform for citizens to perform their civic duties and political obligations. Citizens who exercise their voting rights are likely to be more satisfied

with their membership of the state and their own role in it. Civic engagement is consequently a source of procedural utility, the valuation accorded the political process in its own right rather than its political outcomes (Stutzer & Frey, 2006).

Through political participation, citizens acquire relevant knowledge on political responsibilities, political culture and the organization of the democratic system, its main institutions and their functions, and the roles of incumbents. Increased awareness and accumulation of political knowledge about the smooth running of democratic system have a great determinant impact on the level of affective and evaluative orientations which collectively justify the legitimacy, stability and survival of the political system.

Impact of Social Studies on Voting Behaviour and Political Participation

Education is a dynamic agent of formation, change and development in any society. Education is expected to build up the character of individuals and make them useful members of the public. In a nutshell, education is a necessary condition for the upward social mobility of members of the society. Education is the means by which citizens can have better and quality lives as it provides the students with certain skills, relevant knowledge, abilities and competencies that may be required later in life. Good education aims at providing students with world of opportunities for self-improvement and greater participation in the wider society. The ability of young people to embrace the opportunities for employment, better and quality life, and positive attitudes towards contributing their own quotas to the development of the society, depends to a large extent upon the type and quality of education and training they are exposed to (Ogundiran, 2012). Education should be geared towards the development of the physical, mental and spiritual potentialities of the individuals. In short, education should concern itself with the cultivation of the whole-person and this is where Social Studies education is relevant. It is clear that the ultimate goal of Social Studies is to inculcate in learners, good citizenship with full emphasis on the development of those rational habits and humane attitude that

will enable individual learner make informed decisions about personal and social matters.

Social Studies is concerned with how man lives in a defined physical environment (village, town and city) and how he goes about everyday activities in relation to other people (family, friends, colleagues, teachers, etc.). Some of the activities he engages in everyday may be social, religious, economic, or political, and others purely for his own aesthetic pleasure. Social studies is concerned with all these activities of man (Akinlaye, 1996). Students are expected to acquire relevant knowledge and skills to enable them function effectively in a democratic society. There is no gainsaying the fact that Social Studies occupies an important place in the social development and advancement of any society. This is because Social Studies is found useful in human beings' daily existence, national economic development, as well as in contributing to the intellectual development of its recipients (Meitzeiobi, 2000). Social Studies is one of the core subjects at the Upper Basic level and it is one of the most appropriate tools for achieving the educational goals and objectives of the country.

Yusuf (2004) opines that Social Studies is geared towards producing individuals who will not only possess the capability to solve problems, but who can also contribute to the development of the society. In the National Policy on Education, NPE (2004), one of the goals of the Nigerian Education is the development of individuals into sound and effective citizens. Social Studies as a discipline aims at achieving the NPE's goal because it involves the integration of the individual into the community. Ezegbe (2000) opines that if social studies is effectively taught, it has the potentials to influence the intellectual, social and personal development of the youths. Yusuf (2004) explains that the purpose of intellectual dimension of Social Studies is to introduce the students to the mode of critical thinking involved in decision-making. Iyewarun (1984) adds that the purpose of Social Studies education is to prepare citizens who will perpetuate and improve societies while that of personal education is to help the youths sort out the confusion of the social world. More emphatically, Social Studies through the understanding of human relationships, aims at

producing citizens with skills, competencies, moral status and reasoned judgment to live, interact and contribute positively to the social, economic, political and cultural development of the Nigerian society (Augustus, 2001).

The Way Forward

Arising from the discussion above, it is therefore recommended that more emphasis should be laid on civic education in the Social Studies curriculum. Proper and quality education will go a long way in helping students to make informed decisions and exercise their civic rights when they reach adulthood. Also, government should introduce civic and voter education to rural areas beyond television and radio jingles because many of the rural dwellers do not have the luxury of listening to radio or watching television.

There is need to restructure and revitalise the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The roles of INEC should be positively reformed. It is imperative and urgent for government to ensure that honest, qualified, sincere and non-partisan personnel are appointed to handle the affairs of the Commission. High level of orderliness, transparency and accountability should be exhibited.

Poverty and unemployment should be urgently addressed. Those in authority should establish effective measures to handle poverty. Free, credible and fair elections will enable voters build confidence in the nation's election process and make them see elections as agents of change. This will go a long way in encouraging political participation and increase voters' turnout during elections. Political party reform is an indispensable tool to encourage political participation. Imposition of candidates that may not deliver should be discouraged. Voters' registration, electoral complaints and disputes should be urgently addressed whenever they arise.

Conclusion

Voting is one of the most commonly used terms in contemporary democratic process for recruitment of leadership and election of representatives. The concepts of political participation, electoral process and voting behaviour cannot be removed from democracy which thus calls for the active engagement of the citizens in societal

activities. Citizens have to be properly educated so as to make informed decisions towards active participation in the politics of their country, since the most popular definition of democracy is; ‘Government of the people, by the people and for the people.’

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