

Majority Carry the Vote: Psycho-Demographic Influence on Voting Behaviour

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ABSTRACT The study examined the influence of psychological and demographic variables (age, ethnicity, sex, social class, media and self-esteem) on voting behaviour. 232 randomly selected participants (males and females) in Ibadan metropolis took part in the study. A questionnaire made up of 4 sections was used to collect information from the participants. A multiple regression revealed that of all the psycho-demographic variables only age and self-esteem independently predicted voting behaviour. Also, analysis of Variance showed an interaction effect of age and sex on voting behaviour ($F(1, 214) = 7.26, P < .05$). Thus, it is recommended that appropriate authorities would provide a level playing ground for people of different age and sex to exercise their civic duties, also, mass mobilization aimed at voters being assertive in the election of their leaders should be embarked upon by both government and non-governmental organizations in order to effect positive attitudinal change in the electorates.

INTRODUCTION

Democracy as a system of governance seems to have become an important parameter to measure good governance, development and acceptability in the comity of nations. The United State of America and other European countries considered as leading nations in democratic values are embarking on drives to "democratize" the rest of the world; this is obvious in their foreign policies and stands on international issues. These countries only stand to make democratic rule a precondition for aids, loan and other forms of support.

The continent of Africa is not left out of the push by the Western world towards democratic rules; poverty, corruption, violence and political instability which have made African countries more dependent on Europe and US made the push easier and more pronounced. The leadership in the continent is usually given marching orders to democratize or forget about any aid or support, and this has led to the adoption of the western styled democracy with emphasis on one man one vote.

In Nigeria as in most democratic nations, government is usually enthroned through ballot; citizens who are of voting age have the right to cast their vote to elect their representative during an election. Voting thus, is a means of aggregating individual preferences into collective decision in an election, the action of formally indicating one's choice of candidate or political party at an election (Onyiah, 2000). Against this background

voting is seen as a form of behaviour, it implies the way the voter acts in making his/her choice of candidate or political party at an election, the motivating and determining factors that informs final decisions to vote for a particular candidate.

Study of voting behaviour started around the 18th century (Jensen, 1969), this early attempts made use of aggregate data analysis that is, using actual election returns by geopolitical units e.g. wards, districts etc. (Gosnell, 1930). Advancement in scientific research led to the emergence of another study method of studying voting behaviour, this method made use of analysis of survey data, this involves usage of small but randomly selected samples of eligible voters. Information is collected through the use of standardized instruments administered by train interviewers, this allows for linkage of psycho-demographic variables (e. g. age; self-esteem, ethnicity, social class) to voting behaviour (Lazarfeld et al., 1968).

Like any other human behaviour, voting behaviour can be influenced by a number of factors which may be internal/ external, short term or long term. The personality of an individual may inform his/her behaviour during an election, for instance, an electorate with a high self-esteem will likely assess the various candidates/political parties viz-a-viz their manifestos and his/her own expectations and based on these take a decision on whom or which party to vote for. Whereas, someone with low self-esteem may have to depend on others to take decisions.

Experiences over the years have revealed that though voting is supposed to be an individual thing yet, there have emerged patterns of block voting in electoral history, this phenomenon has been observed in most democracies. People tend to vote along class dimension, ethnic divide and religious affiliation. An example of this can be found in the U. S. where the industrialists who controls production are found basically in the Republican Party while the middle and lower classes people usually vote Democrat.

Researchers over the years have attempted to establish relationship between psychodemographic factors and voting behaviour, however, most of the documented work has been western based. There then arose the question of whether these same factors will influence the voting behaviour of electorates in Nigeria, given the differences in culture and socialization?

METHODS

Research Design: This is a survey study that made use of Ex-post facto research design. None of the variables of interest was actively manipulated in the study.

Participants: The participants were made up of 232 people drawn from various parts of Ibadan metropolis using the accidental sampling technique. 179 (77.2%) were Yorubas, 36 (15.5%) Igbos, 5 (2.2%) Hausas, 8 (3.4%) belong to other ethnic groups while 4 (1.7%) were missing cases. 155 (66.8%) of the participants were single while 75 (32.3%) were married with 2 (9%) divorced. 182 (78.4%) were Christians, 46 (19.8%) Moslems while 4 (1.7%) were missing.

Instruments: Data collection was through the aid of a questionnaire consisting of 4 sections. Section A tapped demographic information. Section B is a 7-item scale authored by Olapegba and Olokungboye (2005) in the Yes/No format measuring media influence on voting behaviour, it has a reliability coefficient of 0.62. Section C is

the voting behaviour scale developed by Olapegba and Olokungboye (2005), it is a 15-item scale in the Yes/No format, it has a reliability coefficient of 0.69. Section D is the Adanijo and Oyefeso self-esteem scale, it is a Likert format scale with 15 items and reliability coefficient of 0.79 and 0.94 among Bankers and students respectively.

Procedure: The questionnaire was distributed to participants using the accidental sampling techniques in homes and offices. Participants were informed that the exercise was purely for academic purpose, they were also assured of absolute confidentiality. The questionnaires were retrieved within two weeks of administration.

Statistical Analysis: Multiple regression analysis and 2X2 Analysis of Variance were used to analyze the data collected.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows there is no joint influence of age, ethnicity, social class, self-esteem and media on voting behaviour ($R^2=0.052; p>.05$). However, age has a significant independent influence on voting behaviour ($B(5, 198)=0.15; t=2.12; <.05$). Also, self-esteem was found to have significant independent influence on voting behaviour ($B(5, 198)=0.16; t=2.29; p<.05$). Ethnicity, social class and media do not have any significant independent influence on voting behaviour.

It has been observed from table 2 that there is a significant interaction effect of sex and age on voting behaviour ($F(2, 214) = 7.26, p<.05$). Whereas there is no main interaction of the two variables on voting behaviour.

DISCUSSION

This study shows there is no joint influence of age, ethnicity, social class, self-esteem and media on voting behaviour, this supports the findings of Hines (1979) in a survey of the elderly

Table 1: Multiple regression analysis table showing the independent and joint influence of age, ethnicity, social class, self-esteem and media on voting behaviour.

Variable	R	R ²	Beta	t	P	df	F	P
	0.227	0.052				5	2.157	>.05
Age			0.154	2.12	<.05			
Ethnicity			0.074	1.041	>.05			
Social Class			0.037	0.531	>.05			
Self-Esteem			0.164	2.286	<.05			
Media			0.009	0.117	>.05			

Table 2: Summary table of a 2 x 2 analysis of variance showing the main and interaction effect of age and sex on voting behaviour.

Variable	SS	MS	DF	F	P
Age	9.119	9.119	1	3.047	>.05
Sex	3.16	3.16	1	0.011	>.05
Age x Sex	21.721	21.721	1	7.26	<.01
Error	631.376	2.992	211		
Total	663.833		214		

in Alaska relating to their voting behaviour. Age however, showed a significant influence on voting behaviour, this is in line with the assertion of Cohen and Carl (1975) that a chronological age criterion for voting is necessary. Shaw (1972) however examined urban university students and found that students' age is unrelated to political participation, and that the enfranchisement of 18 year old will not greatly change present political patterns.

Self-esteem was also found to have significant influence on voting behaviour, this corroborated the findings of Hotchkiss and Lawrence (1987) who found that self-esteem of individuals strongly influences the decision to take on who/which party to vote for in an election. Ethnicity, social class and media do not have influence over voting behaviour probably because experiences of electorates over the years are such that oppression and bad leadership do not have ethnic or class boundary, also, the fact that media control and propaganda is a function of who has money to use them.

Age and sex were found to have interaction effect on voting behaviour, this simply means that the age and sex of both the electorates and the candidates may influence identification which may

ultimately influence voting decision. For instance, the wave of women empowerment campaign and gender sensitivity may make younger women more disposed to voting for a young woman who they perceive as one of their own and that will pursue their course.

In all, it is rather obvious that people do not vote mechanically nor do they respond passively to propaganda, rather, there are many psychological factors and other factors in the environment which interact to influence how people vote in any election.

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