

Influence of Psycho-demographic Factors on Low Voter Turnout in the 2019 Presidential Election among Residents of Mafoluku Registration Areas (Wards) of Lagos State

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Low voter turnout brings about the election of political leaders who are not people's choice since only the minorities are recorded to have cast their vote on election day. Yet, public policies are likely to be affected especially if the competencies of these elected officials are in doubt. This study was therefore designed to investigate the psycho-demographic factors (patriotism, fear of election violence, perceived quality of candidate, learned helplessness and age) influence of low voter turnout in the 2019 Presidential election among residents of Mafoluku registration areas (wards) of Lagos State where content analysis of the 2019 presidential election results obtained from INEC revealed has the lowest voter turnout in Nigeria. The research design was cross-sectional and using the Yamane sample size determination formula, data was collected from four hundred respondents (400) who were purposively and randomly selected with ages ranging from 20 years and above, a mean age of 25.21 and standard deviation of 3.76 using a structured questionnaire with established psychometric properties made up of 53-items. The result indicates that patriotism, fear of election violence, perceived quality of candidate, learned helplessness and age jointly influenced low voter turnout ($R = .152$; $R^2 = .141$; $F(5,385) = 13.831$). Independently, fear of election violence ($\beta = .347$, $p = .000$) and perceived quality of candidate ($\beta = .155$, $p < .007$) predict low voter turnout. The study emphasised the importance of fear of election violence and perceived quality of candidates in determining voters' turnout and suggested the introductions of electronic voting as an option to physical presence of voters at the polling booth and the platform for independent candidacy to complement political parties.

Keywords: Electronic voting, independent candidacy, Lagos State, low voter turnout, Mafoluku registration area (ward)

Introduction

The World Bank 2017 World Development report indicates that election turnout is declining across the world. In the last two and a half decades, the average global voters' turnout rate dropped by more than 10% (World Bank, 2018). Yet, the International Institute for Democracy and Election Assistance (2017) reported that the global population of people who are eligible to vote has more than doubled in the four decades to 2010.

Low voter turnout is manifested by poor or low voter turnout during election. It encompasses the degree to which eligible citizenry decline to participate in an election. In other words, it is the extent to which qualified voters for reason(s) best

known to them fail to cast their vote during election. Crewe et al. (1992) refer to low voter turnout as the absence of feeling for personal responsibility, a passivity and indifference for political affairs. Low voter turnout connotes lack of a feeling of personal obligation to participate in politics and according to IDEA (2016), low voter turnout is operationalized as voter registration (vote/reg %) which is the percentage of registered voters who turn out to vote on election dates. It is also referred to as the percentage of registered voters who vote (Lindberg, 2004).

Low voter turnout can only be measured through voters' turnout which often leads to a situation where minority is choosing for the

majority. The implication is that peoples' preference is denied. According to Taiwo and Ahmed (2014), low voter turnout which is manifested by turnout is an indicator of the ability of government, electoral management and civil society to propel eligible voters to register and vote during election. It has equally been put forward that low voter turnout is a form of political participation and an indicator of the state of health of any democracy either old or new, consolidated or in transition. The crux of this argument is that high turnout indicates healthy democracy while low turnout is seen as unhealthy (Freitag, 2010).

Lindberg (2006) opined that higher voter turnout is an indication of higher level of political participation which brings about greater democratic quality of the election while Yakubu (2012) is of the view that low voter turnout is manifested by increase in the number of registered voters who refused to vote during elections, failure to protest election rigging and violence and failure to assist security agents with necessary information required to address electoral injustice.

Evidences are abounding in the literature on probable causative factors of low voter turnout. According to Omotola (2010), low voter turnout is reflected on voter turnout which is dependent on accurate voter register that is presently not in existence in Nigeria. Similarly, Thomas (2004) asserted that low voter turnout stem from psychological involvement and collective memory of historical and contemporary events, pattern of trust, feeling of efficacy, political engagement and disengagement of individual among others. While Gimpel (2002) attributes low voter turnout to campaign communication and the media. Even forces of attraction and togetherness such as class, religion, urban-rural residency exert considerable influence on voter behaviour (Driskell, Emory, & Lyon, 2008). In the same vein, Gimpel and Schuknecht (2003) posited that geographical and spatial considerations in terms of voting centres, its distance and accessibility are known factors that influence voters' turnout.

Furthermore, the type and nature of social network an individual belong could have influence on political participation and the importance of such network varies among individual (Brady, Schlozman, & Verba, 2015). Also, reduction in the number of voters performing their civic duties of

voting has been reported to occur more in young people than the elderly (Smets, 2012). This is in consonance with the view of Bhatti and Hansen (2012) when it adduced the surge of voting decline among the youth at the individual level of interaction has to do with their family, friends, peer group in school or workplace or membership of social associations. Studies have also revealed that many youths are not interested in politics because the youths are now apolitical, indifferent or generally apathetic towards politics (Kimberlee, 2002; Hein, Weinstein, & Forrest, 2005). However, loader (2007) submitted that the reason for youth indifference to voting is not that they cynically withdraw from politics, rather, it signifies emergence of legitimate opposition.

Although, low voter turnout is caused by some citizens, its impacts are felt by every citizenry especially when the competencies of those elected representatives are in doubt. Accordingly, the correlational studies carried out revealed large relationship on the effect of voters' turnout result and public policies (Anzia, 2012; Fowler, 2013).

In Nigeria, low voters' turnout is manifested by increase in the number of registered voters who refuses to vote during election, failure to protest election rigging and violence as well as failure to assist security agents with relevant information to address electoral injustice (Yakubu, 2012). High level of low voters' turnout is a manifestation of dissatisfaction with the traditional political parties and party structure (Gill et al., 2012).

The year 1999 marked the beginning of the fourth republic. This has remained uninterrupted to the extent that the six constitutionally required general elections were held as at 2019. During this period, the 2007 general election was regarded as the worst election in Nigeria because of the imbibed spirit of do-or-die philosophy (Suberu, 2007; Omotola, 2010; Odio-Akhaine, 2009), whereas, the 2011 general election was adjudged as the most credible election (Egwu, 2011; Gberie, 2011). Yet, the 2019 general election especially, the Presidential election recorded the lowest voter turnout in the history of Nigeria general election (*Daily trust*, 2019). INEC (2019) reports indicates that the number of registered voters was 82,344,107 while the number of votes cast was 28, 614,190 representing 34.7%. Historical comparison of voters' turnout from the 1st, 2nd and 3rd republics

made the 2019 voter turnout marginally similar to the 1979 Presidential election with the recorded number of registered voters as 48,633,782 and votes cast at 16,846,633 representing 34.6% (*Vanguard*, 25 April, 2011).

The number of voters' turnout in the general election of 2019 was the lowest in Nigeria since the advent of the fourth republic in 1999 (INEC, 2019). Between 2015 and 2019 general election, over sixteen million (16.8 million) Nigerian grew up to become eligible to vote, yet, there was a tremendous reduction in the number of voters that participated in the 2019 general election (Nwankwo, 2019). In fact, Nkutt (2019) reported that despite the large number of permanent voters card (PVC) distributed and collected by registered voters, the turnout that followed the election did not reflect such large number.

Be that as it may, the result of the Presidential election and its attendant low voter turnout pose a great challenge for the sustainability of democracy. This is the basis for the set out of this study designed to examine the influence of psycho-social factors (patriotism, fear of election violence, perceived quality of candidate, learned helplessness, age, gender and education) on low voter turnout among residents of Mafoluku registration areas (wards) of Lagos State.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) was used as a theoretical basis for this study. The Theory of Planned Behaviour developed by Ajzen (1985) emphasised on attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control as three key determinants of behavioural intention. According to Ajzen, the attitude component is a function of a person salient behavioural beliefs, which represent perceived outcome or attributes of behaviour while subjective norm is a function of normative beliefs, which represent perception of specific significant others preference about whether one should or not engage in the behaviour and relates to motivation to comply which is the extent to which the person is likely to comply with the wishes of the referent. Also, perceived behavioural control are influenced by belief concerning whether one assess to the necessary opportunities and resources to perform the behaviour successfully weighted by the perceived power of each factor to facilitate or inhibit behaviour (Ajzen, 1988, 1991).

In the domain of the study on voter turnout during election, TPB possess the unflinching means of providing explanation into voter desire to either vote or not during election. Voting behaviour in this context is volitional, easily performed and complex with outcome dependent upon performance of other complex series of other behaviour. TPB is based on the premise that people are rational and make systematic decisions based on available information. By implication, it plays down the individual unconscious motives. TPB alludes to people as being rational in their voting behaviour. Voting during election is a complex exercise which requires choosing from amongst alternatives and the opportunity occurs occasionally. In addition, the Theory of Planned Behaviour explain that voter as a person is being influenced by his/her held belief as well as belief held by others and the desire to be associated with these significant others is responsible for their voting behaviour. And that taking decision on either to vote or abstain from voting may be easy or difficult to achieve.

Methodology

Types and Sources of Data

The study adopted both primary and secondary data. The primary data was collected from a field survey and entails two phases (pilot and field survey). The first phase, a pilot study was carried out to test the research instruments which were developed by the researcher and to prepare logistics for the main survey. The second phase is the main field study which entails administering questionnaires to the respondents. The questionnaire gathered information about voters' turnout in the 2019 presidential election in the study area where it recorded lowest in the country - 4.79%.

Secondary data was the content analysis of results of the 2019 presidential election obtained from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) at the federal, state, local government and Registration areas (wards) level. It encompasses the sequential evaluation of the total number of registered voters and total number of votes cast at the Federal, State, Local government and Registration areas (wards) levels. At the federal level, the analysis of data shows that Lagos State recorded 17.60% voter turnout which is the lowest among the thirty-six States and FCT. There were 6,570,291 total numbers of registered voters and

only 1,156,590 actually voted in the 2019 Presidential election.

Thereafter, results of the election conducted across the twenty (20) local government areas of Lagos State were subjected to further analysis. It revealed that Oshodi-Isolo local government area has 14.80% voter turnout (the lowest among the twenty local government area) of Lagos State. The total numbers of registered voters were 443,948 while the actual number of votes cast was 65,730.

Further analysis of the election result at the local government level revealed that Mafoluku

Registration area (Ward) recorded the least number of voter turnout in Oshodi-Isolo local government area with the number of registered voters put at 31,834 while the number of votes cast was 1,526 representing 4.79%. By implication, Mafoluku is the Registration area (Ward) that recorded the highest number of low voter turnout in Nigeria. These calculations were based on the number of votes cast divided by the number of registered voters and multiply by 100 as shown in figure 1.

Figure 1: Registered Voters and Votes Cast in Nigeria 2019 Presidential Election

Level	Reg. Voters	Votes cast	%	Remarks
Federal (Nigeria)	82,344,111	28,620,190	34.75	
State (Lagos)	6,570,291	1,156,590	17.60	
Senatorial Districts:				
Lagos East (Kosofe)	443,048	75,790	17.10	
Lagos West (Oshodi/Isolo)	443,948	65,730	14.80	
Lagos Central (Eti-Osa)	360,529	54,471	15.10	
Kosofe Local Government (Registration Areas):				
RA06 Ikosi/Ketu/Mile12/Agiliti/Maidan Registration Areas (106 polling units)	93,896	13,455	14.32	Lowest
RA 08 Agboyi 1 Registration Areas (6 polling units)	3,257	820	25.16	Highest
Oshodi/Isolo Local Government (Registration Areas):				
RA06 Mafoluku Registration Areas (37 polling units)	31,834	1,526	4.79	Lowest
RA08 Shogunle-Alasia Registration Areas (42 polling units)	26,829	4,871	18.11	Highest
Eti-osa Local Government (Registration Areas):				
RA02 Victoria Island II Registration Areas (36 polling units)	49,308	4,806	9.74	Lowest
RA 04 Lekki/Ikate & Envs Registration Areas (33 polling units)	63,043	11,504	18.24	Highest

Sample Frame and Sample Size

The target population for this study consisted of residents of Mafoluku Registration areas (wards) in Oshodi-Isolo local government area of Lagos State prior to the February 2019 general election in Nigeria. Mafoluku is one of the eleven Registration areas (Wards) in the local government. Other Registration areas (wards) in the local government include: Shogunle, Alasia/shogunle, Orile-Oshodi, Oshodi-Bolade, Oke-Afa/Ejigbo, Ajao Estate, Ishagatedo, Isolo, Okota and Ilasamaja. Mafoluku Registration area (Ward) is chosen because it is the ward with the highest number of low voter turnout in Oshodi-Isolo local government and invariably in Lagos state and ultimately in Nigeria. There are thirty-six (36) streets that are divided and designated into thirty-seven (37) polling units in Mafoluku Registration areas (wards) where voters cast their votes in the 2019 Presidential election. The name of the streets are as follows: Adedeji, Adesanya, Aduke Thomas, Afariogun, Agbeleale,

Agboola, Akiode, Alhaji Mukandaisi, Amusa, Apakun, Ari Ori, Awoniyi Elemo, Ayinde, Baderin, Branco, Church, Ewu road, Eyinogun, Ijaye, Jubril, Lateef Salami, Mafoluku road, Mafowoku road, Makinde, Odumbaku, Ogunoloko road, Olaiya, Olaore, Oluneye, Olusoji, Omilade, Osolo way (secondary), Peluola, Sadiku, Salami and Shamura street. All the respondents were of voting age (20 years and above) with mean age (25.21) and standard deviation of (3.76) that were purposively and randomly selected from the 36 streets to participate in the study.

The sample size was determined using the Yamane (1967) formula in determining the sample --size for research. Respondents were selected from the 36 streets that made up the registration areas. Based on the estimations, 400 residents were sampled in the survey with a 95% level of confidence and 5% margin error, as approved in the Social Sciences.

Sampling Technique and Data Collection Procedure

The study adopted cross sectional research design with multi stage and non-probability sampling techniques to select 400 respondents. The researcher verified all the streets where the polling units were situated and through balloting randomly selected some of them. Furthermore, the total number of houses in the randomly selected streets were counted with a view to systematically identify those houses from where participants would be drawn using the Nth approach. The Researcher and his Assistants entered the selected houses, introduced themselves, obtained their informed consent on the study and engaged them based on the inclusion criteria. Any resident accosted in the selected house and were willing to participate was engaged. Depending on the number of

systematically selected houses, research Assistants was recruited and assigned the task of administration of the questionnaire after undergoing necessary training. There was a caveat that not more than one respondent from each selected house participated in the study.

The data for this study was collected through the use of structured questionnaire; a standardized scale with established psychometric properties. The 53-items questionnaire comprising of demographic variables, low voter turnout ($\alpha = 0.67$), patriotism ($\alpha = 0.79$), fear of election violence ($\alpha = 0.83$), perceived quality of candidate ($\alpha = 0.82$) and learned helplessness ($\alpha = 0.74$) scales administered to the respondents to examine their influence on voter turnout. Data analysis includes the use of multiple regression analysis

Results

Table 1: Summary of Multiple Regression showing the joint and independent Prediction of Psycho-demographic factors on low voters' turnout among residents of Mafoluku Registration areas (wards) in Lagos State

Variable	R	R ²	F(5, 385)	p	B	SE B	B	T	P
	.152	.141	13.831	< .005					
Patriotism					.060	.058	.054	1.038	.300
Learned Helplessness					-.026	.031	-.047	-.826	.410
Fear of Election Violence					.481	.071	.347	6.741	.000
Perceived Quality of Candidate					.047	.017	.155	2.722	.007
Age					.001	.011	.003	.068	.946

n=400

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine how psycho-demographic factors predict low voter turnout among residents of Mafoluku Registration Areas in Lagos State. The model, which included patriotism, fear of election violence, perceived quality of candidate, learned helplessness and age as predictors was statistically significant, $F(5, 385) = 13.831$, $p < .001$ accounting for 15% of the variance in voter turnout ($R^2 = .152$, Adjusted $R^2 = .141$). This indicates that these factors collectively have a substantial influence on voter turnout, although other variables not examined are likely to play important roles.

Among the individual predictors, fear of election violence emerged as the most significant and powerful variable influencing voter turnout ($\beta = .347$, $p < .001$). This strong positive association suggests that as fear surrounding electoral violence

increases, voter turnout decreases, aligning with established literature that highlights safety concerns as a critical barrier to electoral participation in volatile political environments.

Perceived quality of candidates was also a statistically significant predictor ($\beta = .155$, $p = .007$), demonstrating a positive relationship with low voter turnout. This is a somewhat unexpected finding, as higher candidate quality is typically assumed to enhance voter motivation. The positive coefficient here may reflect voter disillusionment or skepticism, possibly suggesting that even when candidates are viewed favourably, other systemic barriers or a lack of trust in the electoral process suppress turnout. It might also indicate that high candidate quality is not sufficient to overcome the impact of threats such as violence or insecurity.

Other predictors including patriotism ($\beta = .054$, $p = .300$), learned helplessness ($\beta = -.047$, $p = .410$), and age ($\beta = .003$, $p = .946$) were not statistically significant. Their non-significance suggests that in the Mafoluku Registration Area, these factors may not meaningfully shape voting decisions. Based on the result, the stated hypothesis is partially supported.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the independent and collective role of psycho-demographic factor(s) (patriotism, fear of election violence, perceived quality of candidate, learned helplessness and age) on low voter turnout in the 2019 presidential election. Results of the statistical analysis revealed that psycho-demographic factors (patriotism, fear of election violence, perceived quality of candidate, learned helplessness and age) jointly influence low voter turnout while fear of election violence and perceived quality of candidate independently influence voter turnout and thereby supporting the partiality of the outcome of the study. The partiality of this finding on one hand shows the joint influence of these factors on low voter turnout suggesting that several other factors were at play as probable causes of low voter turnout.

This position collaborates with the work of Falade (2014) where it stated that low voter turnout is a feature of Nigeria politics which occur due to in-depth consideration of ethnic, religion and money resulting in politics being practiced with bitterness, hatred and disagreement. This position also aligns with the assertion of Fagunwa (2015) as it was noted that low voter turnout is caused by inadequate mobilisation, weather condition on election day, timing, ethnicity, political party affiliation, poor civil engagement, accountability and motivation. In the same vein, Aloysius et al. (2019) opined that Nigeria political apathy arisen because of the absence of transparency and confidence of the electoral process. In other words, people abstain from voting because of the mistrust of the political process and believe that the outcome of such exercise is not reliable.

On the other hand, fear of election violence and perceived quality of education independently influence low voter turnout. In this connection, fear of election violence was revealed to be an important

factor influencing low voter turnout. This is in consonance with the work of Wenibowei (2011) that the struggle for state power has brought about worst election violence in the country before, during and after election. Election violence according to the author comes in the form of political violence, looting, arson, thuggery and kidnapping among others which could be spontaneous or gradual. In the same direction is the work of Omoweh and Okanya (2005) which noted that heightened political competition for the control of the state and its political power is now a bloody warfare, especially due to the fact that state holds the key to wealth. The influence of threat (real or imagined) has probable factor that brings about low voter turnout. It is also reported in the work of Segun (2013) as it was posited that intense determination of politician to get power or retain power at all cost led to higher rate of violence. In fact, there exist proactive relationship between election violence and low voter turnout. In his contribution, Colliar and Vicente (2014) posited that election violence, harassment, voters fraud seems to affect voters' apathy.

The second factor influencing low voter turnout is the perceived quality of individual. This finding is in line with the view of Brunnerova (2018) that evaluation of candidate rather than institution form the basis of political participation. Similarly, Kirkland and Coppock (2017) reported that perceived quality of candidate in terms of gender, occupation and income are essential component that affect low voter turnout. This submission is in line with the finding of this study. It is equally of note to state that the outcome of this study concur with the assertion of Degan and Merlo (2004) that people who do not have information about candidates are more likely to abstain from voting.

Impact of Psycho-demographic Factors on Voter Turnout

The present study has shown that patriotism, fear of election violence, perceived quality of candidate, learned helplessness and age jointly influence low voter turnout while fear of election violence and perceived quality of candidate are independent predictor of low voter turnout. This means that individual desire to cast vote on election day will be a function of several factors that impinges on the

sense modalities. This implies a marked difference on the extent and intensity of individual quest to go out to vote on election date. Such differences may be borne out of differences inherent in the individual motivation, environmental factor, learning, life experiences, life cycle, personality etc. This is more so as this present study indicate that these psychological factors have a joint percentage contribution (of 15%) on low voter turnout. This means that these factors are not enough to predict low voter turnout, rather, other factors that are not of interest in the present study also contribute to low voter turnout.

In the order of importance and based on percentage contribution, it was found out that fear of election violence exerted much influence than any other factor fear of election violence indicating that disturbance of any form can always compel people to avoiding political engagement except those who are equally compelled to react especially for personal or ulterior purposes. Thus, the degree and extent of election violence determine the decision of individual during election. This assertion is in line with the work of Segun (2013) as it was posited that intense determination of politician to get power or retain power at all cost has further led to the higher rate of violence.

Similarly, the way and manner individual evaluate candidate either real or imagined go a long way in their participation in election as it is based on determination at ensuring that their preferred candidate is elected. If the candidate possesses the expected quality or if the perception of the quality is favourable or positive, there is the tendency for such individual to come out on election date to cast their vote regardless of party affiliation. This finding support the work of Townsley and Milazzi (2022) who reported that the importance of candidate is becoming more prominent and more relevant than political parties in influencing voting behaviour. Voters now look at candidate as object of attraction than party affiliation. Also, the work of Barbornelli et al. (2006) who opined that the overemphasis of candidate referred to as “personalization of politics” has taken prominent role in influencing voting in western politics. Perhaps, this philosophy has also taken shape in Nigeria with her emphasis on candidate determining voting behaviour.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study provides understanding into the trend of political participation among the citizenry. The research objectively dug out the complexities associated with low voter turnout, looking into diverse dimensions among the population of study. Whereas, finding from the study indicates that factors of patriotism, learned helplessness and age do not on their own influence low voter turnout, thereby putting into doubt their contribution into act of governance, but it provides enormous insight on their collective role as important factors exerting influence on voter turnout. This is a good foundation for initiating and sustaining awareness campaign towards improving voter turnout during election. In addition, this study stressed the influence of fear of election violence and perceived quality of candidate on voter turnout, suggesting that these factors played dominant factors in political participation. Understanding the role of these factors would enable relevant agencies to providing relevant intervention that will mitigate low voter turnout.

Hence, it is recommended that the electoral system should introduce platform for independent candidacy in concurrence with political parties as a way of tackling the influence of perceived quality of candidate. Similarly, introduction of electronic voting that will make it possible for voters to cast their vote without physically coming out to vote and thereby avoid falling into the den of violence mongers will be desirable. In this way, fear of election violence would have been solved. And ultimately enhance voter turnout.

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