

2015 Nigerian Presidential Election: Which Factors Drive Voter Turnout the Most?

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Abstract

This paper assesses the relative influence of the factors that spur voter turnout in the 2015 Nigerian presidential election. The influence of eleven variables (drawn from theories) on voter turnout was weighed using binary logistic regression. The logistic regression model was statistically significant, $\chi^2(11)=74.57$, $p<0.01$. The model explained 25.1% (Nagelkerke R²) of the variance in voter turnout and correctly classified 76.4% of cases. Males were 1.16 times more likely to turnout than females. Among the variables, political interest ($p<0.0001$) and political trust ($p<0.0001$) added significantly to the model. The results revealed that political interest and political trust influenced voter turnout more than other factors. However, socio-economic status had some effect on voter turnout. Thus increasing political interest and political trust were associated with an increased likelihood of voter turnout.

Keywords: Voter turnout; 2015 Presidential election; Binary logistic regression; Political interest; Political trust

Introduction

Voter turnout refers to the participation in voting by the people of a democratic state or in any political, social organization. Elections can occur in various settings, such as in selecting a leader in a country, business organization, socio-cultural group, etc. Voter turnout as it is mostly referred to, indicates the level of citizens' participation in voting in a country. African countries recorded high voter turnout following the wave of democratization in the continent from the mid-1980s [1]. However, Nigeria, Egypt, Mali, and Côte d'Ivoire were exceptions. In 2001, Nigeria, with 50.3% was one of the countries that had the lowest level of voter turnout in the world. Côte d'Ivoire (37.0%) and Mali (21.3%) have the least. Nigeria was ranked 157th of 169 countries based on level of voter turnout [2].

Voter turnout in major African democracies has remained high while the Nigeria democracy has continued to underperform. For example, results from South Africa parliamentary elections indicates that in 2014, the country recorded 73.48% voter turnout, in 2009 (77.30%), 2004 (76.73%), 1999 (89.28%). Since 2001, voter turnout in Ghana has increased considerably. For instance, in 2012, 80.15% of the total registered voters participated, in 2008 (72.91%), 2004 (85.12%) (Pinto et al.). In Nigeria, voter turnout in elections has been declining (Table 1) with the lowest being the 2015 election which recorded just 43.65% of voter turnout and a much lower voting age turnout (32.11%). In 2003, Nigeria recorded 69.08%, in 2007 the level of turnout was 58% declining by 11.08%, in 2011 it was 53.68% with 4.32% decline from 2007 and in 2015 it was 43.65% dropping by 10.03%. Thus from 2003 to 2015, voter turnout in Nigeria decreased by 25.43% with the highest decline (11.08%) occurring in 2007. This steady decline in voter turnout following each election perhaps lends credence to the finding of Kuenzi and Lambright [3] that suggests that voter turnout in African democracies decline as more elections are held.

Efforts have been made to identify the factors of low voter turnout in Nigeria. However, there has been little attempt to define the relative degree of the influence these factors exact on voter turnout particularly in the 2015 election. For example, Omodia [4] has argued that elite political actors marginalise the populace thereby limiting even participation and by extension hampers the Nigerian democracy from consolidation. Studies indicate that many Nigerians are not dedicated

to the electoral process for the reason that the political and governance system does not encourage mass participation due to undemocratic tendencies such as rigging, deception, manipulation, sentiments, money politics, ignorance, corruption, unemployment, violence, lack of political interest and efficacy [5-9].

Also, Ibrahim, et al. [10] has argued that economic situations, fear, insecurity, expectations and political socialization among others are the major factors that determined the voting behaviour and political participation of Nigeria. In spite of these studies, there has been little attempt to establish specifically the relative influence of these factors on voter turnout. Most studies have focused on identifying the factors without stating the extent to which these factors drive voter turnout. Although the research by Taiwo and Ahmed [11] stated the relative influence of the factors of voter apathy which are the percentage male population in a given state - interpreted as male dominance of politics, unemployment, low education level and poverty in relative order of magnitude, their study focused on the 1999 to 2011 presidential election leaving the 2015 election.

Consequently, this study extends the debate on the influence of these factors by studying the 2015 presidential election but focuses on voter turnout instead of voter apathy. The study focuses on voter turnout in lieu of voter apathy for the reason that the refusal to voting (voter abstention) by the citizenry is not in and of itself apathy. If voter abstention is rational or normative (i.e. it is normal for people to rationally choose to vote or not to vote), then it is not fair to call it apathy. A much stronger case needs to be made here if these authors want to call voter abstention something that we think contains normative judgments (apathy).

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Year	Voter Turnout	Total Vote	Registration	VAP Turnout	Voting Age Population (VAP)	Population
2015	43.65%	29,432,083	67,422,005	32.11%	91,669,312	181,562,056
2011	53.68%	39,469,484	73,528,040	48.32%	81,691,751	155,215,57
2007	58%	NA	61,567,036	NA	71,004,507	131,859,73
2003	69.08%	42,018,735	60,823,022	65.33%	64,319,246	129,934,91
1999	52.26%	30,280,052	57,938,945	57.36%	52,792,781	108,258,35

NA: Data not available, VAP: Voting age population.

Source: Computed from Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) website (<http://www.inecnigeria.org/>).

Table 1: Nigerian Population, Registration, and Voters Turnout (1999 To 2015).

Literature Review

The democratic system allows for the citizens participation in the electoral and decision making process through voting during election. Elections on national as well as regional levels are mechanisms for the allocation of power within society. It also shapes the political, societal and economic development of society [12]. Political participation is said to have reciprocal effects in the form of political efficacy or the sense of belonging or influencing the government to be responsive to the needs and wishes of the people [13]. The level of electoral participation of the citizens determine, to a degree, the success of the electoral system [8].

Voting is the most visible and widespread form of citizen participation in the electoral process. Thus the most widely reported indicator of level of participation is voter turnout. The vote is the primary thing for citizens to make their governments accountable. If a great portion of citizens do not create their opinions, elections would produce no incentives for politicians to execute policies in the interest of the people [7]. Furthermore, low level of electoral participation prevents elections to correctly perform their three main purposes which are the accountability effect, legitimacy effect and representative effect [7]. The accountability effect disciplines the elected officials by threat of not being re-elected. The legitimacy effect refers to electing competent individuals for public office and the representative effect reflects the preferences of a large pool of voters. Most importantly, the accountability effect affects the incentives facing politicians directly because political officials tend to put in good performance when they foresee that they would not be re-elected [7]. Election is therefore seen as a tool for sanctioning elected officials to act in the best interest of the people [7]. Thus participation in election is the most vital tool citizens can wield to affect policies in their country to the betterment of their lives. Refraining from elections is thus a thoughtless action that must be checked.

On the contrary, Rosema [14] has contended that voter turnout might not be a threat to democracy as often argued but could be a blessing in disguise because those who participate are better informed and have superior knowledge on making better political choice thus enabling elections to perform their key functions of mandate and accountability. Rosema [14] asserts that the level of turnout affects how well particular groups are represented at the polls (potential threat) and also the proper linkage of their votes with the mandate and accountability function of elections which is the "potential blessing". Thus the low level of turnout produces electoral benefits in terms of legitimacy effect and accountability effect which Agu et al. [7] refers to as electing competent officials and sanctioning of politicians to perform in the best interest of the people respectively, which then mean that low turnout does not really matter from neither perspective as [14] has noted.

Electoral participation may be affected by the degree to which information regarding election is available to the public, and the ease with which potential voters can access information [15,16]. Sobbro

and Navarra [17] indicated that people who are independent or less informed turnout the less. Franklin [18] remarked that awareness can spur mobilization and broad participation of the citizenry in electoral activities. Intensive campaigns may give electors heightened awareness and increase the perceived relevance of elections and thus improve participation levels [16]. The need to sustain awareness on the importance of politics without violence to engender participation even among women was stressed [6].

Kasara [19] noted that in Kenya, violence is used to redistribute voter turnout in areas where politicians do not have large support. Violence is particularly used where there is high propensity for the people to migrate in fear of electoral violence such as the Kenyan Rift Valley region. Wantchekon [20] has contended that politicians could benefit from violence and the capacity to create violence when elections take place. Some voters may vote tactically for the political party with the highest capacity to cause violence because they prefer peace to voting for the party whose policies they most prefer [20]. Furthermore, Collier and Vicente [21] have argued that poor and unpopular candidates are most likely to use violence to suppress the turnout of unaligned voters because public disapproval of violence makes intimidation costly for candidates. Klopp [22] argues that Kenyan politicians used the ethnic clashes that took place in the 1990s to eject potential opponents' supporters and secure their electoral areas effectively.

Jackson [23] asserts that socio-demographic factors influence voter registration and turnout of citizens. While adults tend to participate more, young adult of voting age do not participate much in election [24]. Besides, economic inequality has negative implications on electoral participation because economic resources are easily converted to political resources [25]. Thus the concentration of income and wealth in an area often increases political influence which spurs participation [25]. Further, voting is positively related with the level of education and the degree of satisfaction (social trust) of the electorate with the political system [8,25]. Citizens with better education levels tend to participate more because they are more aware of the importance of participation [17].

Hardship and civil strife can also affect participation. In Nicaragua, voter apathy tends to be low. The increased rate of voter turnout in Nicaragua has been attributed to the fact that the citizens see elections as source of hope that situations in the country will get better and a chance to strengthen their democracy. Nicaragua is facing dictatorship and civil conflict and most of the population is deprived of adequate access to work, education, agricultural credit and decent housing [26].

Voter turnout in Nigeria has been decreasing (Table 1). The reasons for low level of electoral participation in Nigeria have been attributed to democratic practices in the country. Omodia [4] has argued that elite political actors marginalise the populace thereby limiting even participation and by extension hampers the Nigerian democracy from consolidation. Falade [8] indicated that many Nigerians are not dedicated to the electoral process because the political system does

not support mass participation. This is as a result of the undemocratic tendencies such as rigging, deception, intimidation, manipulation, sentiments, money politics, ignorance, corruption, unemployment, violence and uncertainties that characterize the political system [4-9].

From the literature review so far, the issue of voter apathy has gained attention globally. In Nigeria, a good number of research have been done to find clues to the causes of voter apathy however, relatively little attention has been given to identifying the relative magnitude of the influence of these factors and which theoretical perspective best explains voter apathy in Nigeria thus, the focus of this research.

Theoretical Framework

Voting is that critical aspect of political participation in a democracy. Political participation encapsulates other activities such as political campaigns, protests, signing of petitions, political advocacy etc. There are three dominant theoretical perspectives on voter turnout. These are the theories of rational choice, socio-economic theories and theories of political efficacy.

The Socio-economic theory

Indicates that socioeconomic status (SES) can determine individual participation in political activities. The theories suggest that individuals with high level of socioeconomic status such as education, occupation and income are more likely to adopt psychological orientations that motivate their participation in voting. This model was first expounded by Verba and Nie [27,28] as an explanation of mass political behaviour. Studies have frequently shown that socioeconomic status is a critical determinant of political involvement [29,30]. SES is often cited as the primary factor that accounts for variation in rates of political participation across racial and ethnic groups [29,31]. Several research have also indicated that people with high level of education, income and occupational status tend to campaign more, organize more, contact more and vote more than those at the lower rung of the socioeconomic ladder [32-35].

The theory also conceives the nature of individual's relationship to the larger society as factors that spur voter turnout. In other words, individuals' political participation is a function of the connectedness of the individual citizen and the larger political and social community [36]. This notion adopts structural or behavioural factors such as organization involvement, church attendance [37] home ownership, and marital status as indicators of social connectedness [38].

Political efficacy theory

Is based on the supposition that individuals' orientation such as political interest, trust in government, and civic duty are important

determinants for voter turnout [39]. The most consistent results from these sets of indicators are the significant relationship between political interest and political trust on participation in electoral politics [40]. Studies suggest that people who have interest in politics often turnout at elections than people who do not engage in politics. Typically, political office holders at local levels and beyond are more likely to engage in voting but people who have high trust for their government engage in political activities the more [41].

Theory of rational choice

Argues that voters consider the costs and benefits of voting in deciding whether to vote or not [42]. Thus people turn up to vote when they consider that the benefits of voting surpass the costs [43]. The cost of voting is not measure in monetary terms only. Voters also consider time, energy and the chance to do other activities [44]. What constitute benefits may include free and fair election, voters' preferred candidate or party is likely to win, the election will be violent free, the elected candidate will do the wish of the voters etc. [10]. Crewe, Fox and Alt [45] argue that this way of thinking is unsound because voting is a very 'easy' form of political participation that requires minimal effort and initiative. It does not demand the voter's engagement in conflictual or co-operational behaviours with other people [45]. However, Kolovos and Harris [46] argued that this 'easy' act has a high value attached to it as such voters measure the merits and demerits of turn up to vote.

In the Nigerian context, these theories offer an explanatory framework to understand the reasons why people refrain from voting. From literature, many Nigerians abstain from voting and other political engagements due to undemocratic practices such as election rigging, electoral violence, intimidation, manipulation etc. [7,8]. These factors sum up to wane the political trust of the citizenry and distrust in the government and its institutions particularly the electoral umpire-INEC. Thus the lack of political interest and political trust in terms of the elections being credible, and in the provision of security during voting exercise results in Nigerians abstention from voting.

In addition, literature evidences in Nigeria suggest that poverty, vote buying, unemployment and gender [11], individuals social relation with the larger social groups [10] affect voter turnout. These findings are in tandem with the socio-economic theory. Despite the relevance of these theories, it has been argued that each of these theoretical approaches cannot fully explain the reasons for or non-participation in political events such as election [47]. Thus the integration of these theoretical views is often suggested [47]. Consequently, the study is anchored to all the theoretical perspectives. Table 2 provides the variables drawn from the theories to explain voter turnout.

Indicators	Variables	Description
Socio-economic status	Education level	People with higher level of education will tend to participate more
	Income	People with higher level of income will tend to participate more
	Occupation	People with better occupational status e.g. white collar jobs tend to vote more
Demographic	Age	Voting increases with age, peaks at middle-age and drops at old age
	Gender	Male tends to vote more than female citizens
Political Efficacy	Political interest	Individuals having interest in politics tend to vote more
	Political trust	Those who have trust in the government tend to vote more.
Social connectedness	Marital status	Married people tend to vote more than singles
	Home ownership	Owing a home will increase the probability of participating in the electoral process.
	Church attendance	Individuals who attend church frequently tend to vote more.
	Membership to Social organization	Individuals who identified more with their group tend to participate more

Table 2: Factors of voter turnout to be investigated in the study area.

Methodology

The study area

Nigeria is a country in West Africa, the largest in the continent and 7th in the world in terms of population with estimated 187 million people in 2016 by Population Reference Bureau. Geographically, Nigeria is located within the confines of 3° and 14° East Longitude and 4° and 14° North Latitude. Nigeria has an area of 923,769 square kilometres. Land area is 909,890 square kilometres while 13,879 square kilometres is of water area. Nigeria shares border with Republics of Benin and Niger in the west; in the east by the Republic of Cameroon; on the north by Niger and Chad Republics and on the south by the Gulf of Guinea [48].

The country is made of 36 states and the capital territory. These states are grouped into geopolitical zones namely the North West, North East, North Central, South East, South South and South West. The states are divided into local government areas (LGAs) and the LGAs are further divided into wards. For this study two states with the largest population were selected in each of the geopolitical zones. From each of these selected states, the LGA with largest population was selected for study (Table 3) for the reason that places with large population in Nigeria tend to have high level of voter abstention [11]. From each LGA selected, three wards were selected systematically from the list of wards in each LGA to ensure that there is even coverage throughout the wards.

Questionnaire design

The questionnaire was designed to obtain relevant data on the variables for the analysis. The dependent variable was voting and it was set as dichotomous (i.e. Yes for 'voted' and No for 'did not vote'). Education, income, occupation, age, political interest, political trust and church attendance were set to three response categories. Gender, marital status, home ownership and membership to organization were set to dichotomous response category as shown in Table 4.

Questionnaire administration

500 copies of questionnaire were administered proportionally based on the voting age population in all the selected LGAs (Table 3). Only adult citizens who were 19 years old or over responded to the questionnaire that is, those who were eligible to vote in 2015. The questionnaire administration took place from October 2015 to May, 2016. Respondents were drawn based on the voting age population

in the study area using the 2015 estimated population of each of the selected states.

Going by the 2015 general elections, the voting age population of Nigeria was 91,669,312 which are 50.5% of the total estimated population for that year. Thus in general, it is expected that 50.5% of the population in the study area were eligible to participate in the 2015 election. This study adopts the voting age population of the study area as the sample frame thus accounting for all those who are eligible to vote. Sample size determination was based on Taro Yamane's framework. The estimation of the sample size is made through the formula, Yamane [49]:

$$n = \frac{N}{I + N(e)^2} \quad (1)$$

Where n is the sample size, N is the population, I (1) is a constant, and e is the error limit (0.03). The voting age population for the study area is 3,302,910 and the sample size is 400. This was distributed proportionally across all states in the study area. A 25% overflow in sample size was made to make up for any unreturned questionnaire in the course of administration. The overflow is distributed proportionally across all the sampled LGAs. The sampling results are detailed in Table 3. Systematic sampling was used to select respondents in three wards in each of the LGAs based on the number of residential units in each ward. Of the 500 copies of questionnaire administered only 394 (78.8%) were returned and aided the analysis.

The questionnaire was administered to one respondent in any selected household. A household consists of one or more people who live in the same dwelling and may consist of a single family or some other grouping of people [50]. The household is the basic unit of analysis in many social, microeconomic and government models [50] and the basic unit of data collection by the National Bureau of Statistics of Nigeria [48].

The data were analysed using binary logistic regression. A logistic regression was performed to ascertain the effects of income, education, occupation, gender, age, marital status, political interest, political trust, home ownership, membership to organization and church attendance on the likelihood that participants voted during the 2015 presidential election. Binary logistic was used because the dependent variable (vote or did not vote) is categorical and independent variables did not exhibit linear relationship with dependent variable so multiple linear regression cannot be used. Binary logistic regression does not

Geopolitical Zone	State	State pop (2015 est.)	LGA	LGA pop (2015 est.)	Voting age Population	Sample Size	Overflow	QR
North Central	Benue	4,942,141	Gboko	419,800	217,204	26	7	28
	Niger	4,689,982	Mokwa	287,861	148,939	18	5	20
North East	Bauchi	5,515,303	Bauchi	585,221	302,793	37	9	37
	Gombe*	2,775,400	Akko	395,984	204,882	25	6	24
North West	Kano	11,087,817	Nasarawa	703,403	363,941	44	11	43
	Kaduna	7,102,880	Igabi	500,464	258,940	31	8	29
South East	Anambra	4,805,646	Aguata	425,569	220,189	27	7	25
	Imo	4,609,038	Mbaitoli	278,678	144,188	17	4	17
South South	Rivers	6,041,378	Port-Harcourt	638,360	330,288	40	10	39
	Delta	4,675,526	Ughelli North	376,330	194,713	24	6	24
South West	Lagos	10,694,912	Alimosho	1,406,785	727,871	88	22	86
	Oyo	6,615,059	Ibadan North East	365,215	188,962	23	6	22
Total	84,438,378				3,302,910	400	100	394

*Gombe was chosen in lieu of Borno State for security reasons in Borno State.

Table 3: Sampling scheme.

Variables	Coding
Voter turnout (dependent variable)	Voted=Yes did not vote=No (dichotomous)
Education level	Pry/sec=0, ND/NCE– HND/BSc=1, MSc–PhD=2
Income	≤ 100k=0, 101k–200k=1, 201k–300k=2
Occupation	Elementary occupations=1, secondary occupation=2, tertiary occupation=3
Age	24 –43=0, 44–63=1, 64–83=2
Gender	Male=1, Female=0
Political interest	No interest=0, sometimes interested=1, very interested=2
Political trust	No trust=0, low trust=1, high trust=2
Marital status	Single=0, married=1
Home ownership	Landlord=1, tenant=0
Church attendance	Do not attend=0, occasional=1, regular=2
Membership to Social organization	Member=1, none member=0

Table 4: Specification of variables for binary logistic regression model.

		Variables in the Equation							
		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95.0% C.I. for EXP(B)	
								Lower	Upper
Step 1 ^a	PI [*]	.907	.198	20.896	1	.000	2.478	1.679	3.656
	PT [*]	.879	.170	26.663	1	.000	2.408	1.725	3.361
	EDU	.385	.204	3.555	1	.059	1.470	.985	2.194
	HO	.506	.273	3.440	1	.064	1.658	.972	2.830
	AGE	.292	.170	2.970	1	.085	1.339	.961	1.868
	MTO	-.434	.261	2.765	1	.096	.648	.388	1.081
	INC	.202	.180	1.257	1	.262	1.223	.860	1.741
	MS	-.168	.372	.205	1	.651	.845	.408	1.751
	GEN(1)	.149	.397	.142	1	.707	1.161	.534	2.526
	OCU	.058	.180	.104	1	.747	1.060	.745	1.506
	CA	.026	.158	.028	1	.867	1.027	.753	1.399
		Constant	-4.274	.789	29.337	1	.000	.014	

^aVariable(s) entered on step 1: INC, EDU, OCU, PI, PT, AGE, GEN, MS, HO, CA, MTO.
^{*}Significant variables

Table 5: The effects of the variables on voter turnout.

assume a linear relationship between the independent variables and dependent variable and it can handle nonlinear effects [51]. Besides, voting behaviour is not often linear. The calculations was done using the Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS)

Results and Discussion

Voting is the most visible and widespread form of citizens’ electoral participation. Thus the most widely reported indicator of level of participation is voter turnout. Voter turnout is usually expressed as the percentage of voters who cast a vote (i.e., “turnout”) at an election. This total number of voters includes those who cast blank or invalid votes, as they still participate. The pool of eligible voters can be defined in two major different ways, first, the number of registered voters and second, voting age population (VAP) [2,52].

The determinants of voter turnout are many but based on the theories this study is anchored to, the effects of eleven variables were tested. These variables are income, education level, occupational status, political interest, political trust, age, gender, marital status, home ownership, church attendance and membership to organization. The results of the binary logistic regression are presented in Tables 5-7. The logistic regression model was statistically significant, $\chi^2(11)=74.57$, $p<0.01$. The model explained 25.1% (Nagelkerke R²) of the variance in voter turnout and correctly classified 76.4% of cases. Males were 1.16 times more likely to turnout than females.

The results show that political interest ($p<0.0001$), political trust

($p<0.0001$) added significantly to the model/prediction, but income ($p=0.262$), education ($p=0.059$), occupation ($p=0.747$), age ($p=0.085$), gender ($p=0.707$), marital status ($p=0.651$), home ownership ($p=0.064$), church attendance ($p=0.867$), membership to organization ($p=0.096$) did not add significantly to the model. Thus increasing political interest and political trust were associated with an increased likelihood of voting. However, education, age, home ownership and membership to organization are variables that can also help explain voter turnout perhaps if a large population is studied. These four variables nearly added significantly to the model. In general, the order of influence of these factors are as follows: political interest, political trust, education, home ownership, age, membership to organization, income, marital status, gender, occupation and church attendance.

This study indicates that the major reason why people did not vote in the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria is their psychological disposition to politics in that year which confirms the tenets of the political efficacy and rational choice models [53,54]. The findings are in tandem with some earlier research in Nigeria which contend that voter abstention is influenced by people’s lack of political interest [8] and lack of trust in government [7,8,10].

In addition, the abstention from voting by many Nigerians can be argued as a rational choice given the undemocratic tenets of the Nigerian politics such as electoral violence, killings, intimidation, ballot snatching, rigging etc. Many people prefer to stay away from exercising their suffrage than falling prey of deadly electoral tugs [55,56]. Onapajo

Model Summary			
Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox and Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	384.284 ^a	.172	.251

^aEstimation terminated at iteration number 5 because parameter estimates changed by less than .001.

Table 6: The binary logistic regression model summary.

Classification Table ^a					
	Observed		Predicted		Percentage Correct
			Vote		
			No	Yes	
Step 1	Vote	No	267	21	92.7
		Yes	72	34	32.1
	Overall Percentage				76.4

^aThe cut value is .500

Table 7: Classification of the dependent variable.

[57] has argued that incumbents use violence to rig election in Nigeria. Electoral violence is directly linked to the electoral process and takes on various forms including assassination, kidnapping, arson, looting, ballot-stealing and armed attacks on voting and collation centres [58,59]. It is particularly targeted at voters, candidates, election observers, electoral officers, the media, electoral information (e.g. registration data, voting results, campaign materials), electoral facilities (e.g. ballot boxes, polling stations) and electoral events (e.g. campaign rallies, voter-education exercises, vote-counting exercises) [60].

Rudolph and Evans [61] have argued that political trust or more closely social trust has important attitudinal and behavioural consequences for democracy. Falade [8] has argued that Nigerians indifference to politics is caused by their lack of trust for the government. In the vein [25] remarked that people tend to participate more as the social trust of citizens in their government improve.

Hard as it is difficult to believe that socio-economic status particularly poverty does not explain much of the voter turnout that we see in Nigeria as most studies have argued, this study does not completely underplay its influence. From the results of analysis, socio-economic status does have influence especially education and home ownership but the extent to which socio-economic factors can explain the decision of an individual to vote hinges on his psychological orientation to the political environment. Based on theory, wealthy and highly educated individual are supposed to vote more than the poor and less educated but in Nigeria it is not often the case. In fact the lack of trust in the political and electoral institution make most educated and wealthy people abstain strategically because they consider voting as waste of time given that there vote may not make any difference.

Yet, some poor individual with low socio-economic status may still vote despite not having trust in the electoral process and in the government. Such individuals may have been spurred to vote because they are going to get paid for voting. Literature evidences support this position. For instance, Danjibo and Oladeji [62] contend that vote buying is caused by illiteracy and poverty while Bratton [54] indicated that vote buyers in Nigeria use both monetary and material incentives to induce voters to either turnout or for a particular party. Vicente and Wantchekon [63] and Vicente [64] noted that vote buying enjoys widespread support in West Africa specifically in Nigeria and increases participation.

To drive home this point let me seek refuge in the words of Jensen and Justesen [65] “poor voters are significantly more likely to be targets of vote buying than wealthier voters. This effect increases when elections are highly competitive. Thus, micro-level poverty seems

to be an important source of vote buying in Africa and has major implications for the way electoral democracy operates.”

The 2015 presidential election was a keen contest between the ruling People’s Democratic Party (PDP) which ruled for 16 years following the turn of democracy in the country in 1999 and the All Progressive Congress (APC) - a merger of some opposition parties. In the build-up to the election, many Nigerians feared that the country was going into war following threats and counter threats of war by the supporters of the two parties. Of concern also was the Boko Haram insurgents who threatened to disrupt the election and ordered people in the North East of the country not to vote. Following this threat, the election earlier scheduled for February 2015 was postponed for six weeks to beef up security in the North East. In the South, the Niger Delta militants also threatened to unleash war on Nigeria should good luck Jonathan fail to win the election.

The electoral support garnered by incumbent, good luck Jonathan being a Christian from the Niger Delta and the APC’s flag bearer, Muhammadu Buhari - a former Head of State (1983-1985) being a Muslim from the north restructured the Nigerian electoral map into a north-south divide taking semblance of the country before amalgamation of the north and south protectorates in 1914. Many voters were sceptical about the outcome of the election following continued outcry by the media and the opposition that the election was going to be rigged. These events did not go without it consequences on voter turnout. The result was that though some people had interest in the election they lost trust in the electoral process and in the government which spurred their abstention.

Conclusion

This study assesses the relative influence of factors of voter turnout in the Nigerian presidential election of 2015. Importantly, the study finds that political trust and political interest have dominant influence on voter turnout in the election. Political trust, political interest and the socio-economic status in this order influenced voter turnout. Thus the negative psychological inclinations of the Nigerian citizens towards voting due to these factors - political interest and political trust as well as socio-economic status influence the decision of eligible voters to turnout at the 2015 presidential election.

Therefore, the study suggests that politicians should avoid making unachievable. Legislation should be made to punish political candidates that make false promises. Voter education needs to be intensified. Early education of the citizen on the importance of voting particularly at the secondary school level can help in the reorientation of young people on

the need to participate in the electoral process before they are eligible to vote. Electoral debates should be legitimized to enable voters decide on the best candidate.

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