



AN APPRAISAL OF THE SOCIOLOGICAL FACTORS OF VOTING PATTERN IN THIRD WORLD COMMUNITIES: THE NIGERIAN CASE.

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Abstract:

There is no gainsaying that credible elections constitute a major factor in democracy, the way election is conducted in a country determines to a great extent the level of political culture, political participation, voting pattern, and good governance in the country. This paper is an appraisal of the sociological factors of voting pattern in the third world communities with a special consideration to Nigeria. The paper is objectively guided to appraised socio-cultural factors that influence voting pattern in the study area. In exhuming these factors, the research adopted the participatory observation method and the use of secondary data to achieving the aim of the research. The research also discovered that religion and ethnic affinity had strongly influenced voting pattern in the study area. The paper do recommends that an informed political ethics or objective electoral act devoid of elitist interest be enacted so as to cope parochialism in the political culture of the third world communities.

Key words: voting, -pattern, sociological, - factors, third-world, communities, Nigeria

Introduction

Voting behaviour is an electoral activity. It is a combination of personal and electoral action, which manifests during an electoral process. Such include voting during elections, involvement in electoral campaigns and participation in electoral rallies as well as support for a candidate or a political party (Bratton et al., 2012).

In the developed countries, the level of citizen participation in the electoral process is dwindling, largely because real choice is limited and the people feel a sense of powerlessness rather than satisfaction. In developing countries, especially African states, elections are riddled with tension, conflicts, crises and fraud such that it is difficult

to use them as a barometer of the peoples' choice. Hence, the euphoria of the second wave of democratization in Africa is fast receding (diminishing) Yesterday's icons who led civil society in the struggles for democratic renewal have been transformed into the images of those against whom they fought. They have assumed dictatorial postures; they manipulate elections and tend towards sit-tight regimes (Adejumobi 2000).

Election is a new opportunity/avenue for citizens to indicate their choice amongst candidates, manifestoes, policies and programmes presented to them by individuals vying for leadership positions (Ayeni-Akeke, 2008). Election is also an instrument for removing unpopular and ineffective leaders as well as forcing elected officials to hearken to the plight of the people, this is because the people hold the power to the renewal or cancellation of the tenure of every elected official. But how informed are the citizenry of the third world communities like Nigeria knew their political right of choice? What then defines the Nigerian political culture? Has propaganda taken hold of the popular will? Or has populism strive against elitist dominant in governance?

According to international election monitors and observers, the conduct of the 2011 and the 2015 general elections were seen as better than the previous elections, while the 2019 general elections were remarkably described as an improvement on what obtained in 2015 particularly as it relates to competitiveness while that of 2023 However, these arguments cannot stand from the antagonists' perspective as Labour Party presidential candidate Peter Obi insists that the 2023 presidential election is the worst in the history of Nigeria (Francis, 2023). The Arise television morning show (2023) indicate the election filing suit as it was presented before the election petition tribunal reflecting one of the worst election considering the abuse of the 2022 electoral law. Akinferinwa (2023) found ambiguity in the pronouncement of the APC presidential candidate as the winner of the 2023 presidential election has some gaps in the constitution, and the 2022 electoral act was not addressed. " Section 64(a) of the electoral act stipulated that the presiding officer can only collate and announce the result of an election subject to verification and confirmation that accreditation number and voters stated on the collation results are correct and consistent with the voters' results recorded and transmitted from the poll units" (Akinferinwa, 2023). This electoral mandate was not fulfilled by the INEC. The electronic voting squanders, logistics challenges, violence in some areas across the states, and election malpractice undermined the credibility of the election (Premium Times, 2023).

Statement of problem

Electoral process is a complex process that encompasses the good intentions and undesirable outcomes of election globally and particularly, in emerging democracies of Africa. In Nigeria, Elections are usually heralded with fears, anxieties, uncertainties,

intimidations, excessive use of money, bribery, corruption, rigging, misconducts, irregularities, logistics problem and other issues related to that (Sule, 2018) this assertion is further elaborated with a political culture of religious manipulation, ethnicity, regionalism and nepotism as observed by (Rufai: 2011). Voting in an election in Nigeria is characterized by individuals or group affinity with leaders that belong to the same religious groups, ethnic cleavages, region and other sentiments.

To vote is to make an informed decision about particular issue or issues at stake; however, the direction of the decision is determined by certain factors which shape voting behaviour. Therefore, as to what is obtained in system 'A' may not be the same with the one in political system 'B'. As such, the factors that define them instituted the gaps that need to be addressed in this research. More so, what inform the What, Why and how questions of voter's pattern in deciding those that represent them became pertinent to this paper.

Objective of the paper

The objective of this paper is to appraise the socio-cultural factors that influences voting pattern in the Nigerian elections; having in mind the colonial experiences and historical antecedent of the global political scope and the international power play.

Methodology

The paper employed the qualitative method of research through content analysis where secondary data was used, participatory observation was also used; this was achievable due to the fact that the researchers were actors in the recent 2023 election.

Literature and Conceptual Framework

Election

Elections are the heart of the political process. Perhaps no questions in politics are as crucial as do we elect the politicians who rule over us, and under what rules are these elections held? Elections are seen as nothing less than democracy in practice. They are a means through which the people can control their government, ultimately by 'kicking the rascals out'.

"Nigeria is in the league of less successful countries in the area of election management and outcomes: the electoral rules are either unclear, ever changing, or easily subverted; the electoral body is structurally weak and perennially ineffective; the political actors and agencies are like gladiators in their conduct; while the

people are often powerless in an environment of political and electoral misdemeanour. Voting does not amount to choosing in the Nigerian environment, as electoral choices are made by political barons outside the environment of electoral norm, rules and procedure. In such circumstances, 'winners and losers have often been determined before the contest, and voters merely go through the charade of confirming choices already made' (Fawole, 2015:15).

This then informs that elections in Nigeria are a mere exercise where rules of the game are not considered anything, thereby subverting the will of the people for elitist interest. Nwodo (2011) explains that, Election is what gives birth to the future not the stories of the past. This typically means that elections is a new opportunity to either correct or improve the events of the future taking lessons from the past and not living in them. Election is a new opportunity/avenue for citizens to indicate their choice amongst candidates, manifestoes, policies and programmes presented to them by individuals vying for leadership positions (Ayeni-Akeke, 2008).

Voting

The term generally refers to the process by which citizens choose candidates for public office or decide political questions submitted to them.

Generally, when a vote is taken the decision of the majority prevails; for some types of decisions, it may be provided that there must be an absolute majority of those qualified to vote, or some majority greater than half, either of all those qualified to vote or of all those actually voting, for a particular decision to be valid. A voice vote, in which the voters shout "yes or no", is simple and quick, but acceptable as a final decision only if those declared to be in minority are satisfied that they really are in a minority (Okolie, 2004).

Voting in an election into public offices is usually conducted using ballot boxes. Therefore, takes the form of thumb printing in the ballot paper provided. Voting processes have undergone transformations over the year in Nigeria, from secret ballot system; the electoral commission experimented with open-ballot system, and modified open-secret ballot system (Okolie, 2004). The voting system varies from country to country but one basic point that underlines all voting in a given social formation is decision making. To vote is to make an informed decision about particular issue or issues

at stake; however, the direction of the decision is determined by certain factors which shape voting behaviour.

Voting Pattern

The analysis of voting patterns invariably focuses on the determinants of why people vote as they do and how they arrive at the decisions they make. In essence, it means the participation and non-participation of the electorate in an electoral process. Studies on political and voting behaviour focus on the determinants of voter choice (Guardado & Wantchekon, 2017. Agomor & Adams, 2014. Bratton et' al 2012, Heywood, 2013, Prysby and Scavo, 1993). These demonstrate that electoral decisions are not just taken overnight but are influenced by certain factors which according to (Heywood 2013) are in cure by short and long term effects. The short-term effects are peculiar to specific elections and can change from one election to the other. Such effects may include the government or regime performance, the charisma of candidates and the condition of the state's economy. Instances of long-term effects may include loyalty to the party which may be stable over a long period (Heywood, 2013). It is important to note that loyalty to the party in some instances can be an element of the short-term effects. This is because in some democracies particularly the new and developing democracies of Africa, party loyalty can be withdrawn in a short time. In such democracies, personal interest rather than party loyalty comes first. This I agree to this assertion as put forth by Heywood, in Nigeria, personal interest and primordial issues take centre stage rather than regime or government performance.

Prysby and Scavo (1993) identified several attitudinal and social factors that may determine or shape the decision of voters in an election. On the one hand, they posited that individual attributes, assessment of government performance, knowledge of particular policy concerns, and party affiliation are the primary attitudinal factors that may determine the choice of the voter during elections. On the other hand, they identified ethnic group, faith, constituency and gender as the social factors that influence the voting decision. The influence these factors have on voter choices during specific elections assists in predicting electoral outcomes and enhances the comprehension of electoral dynamics (Prysby and Scavo, 1993). The researcher concord to this position, owing to the fact that the area under investigation (Nigeria) exhibited tendency of ethnic and religious character in terms of electoral processes and political choices.

Political culture

Political culture is the study of regime outcomes in the context of political attitudes and behaviours (Diamond, 1999). It investigates the connection between actors, action and consequences in the political arena. It therefore incorporates both the political ideals and operating norms of a polity (Ketzner, 1988). It includes formal protocols as well as

customs, traditions and a political behaviour passed down from generations; and encompasses, a well-established political trait that characterizes a society (Udim, 2014). Roskin (2014) stated that political culture is the political psychology of a nation. Political culture therefore is a combination of attitudes and practices held by person that shapes their political behaviour. Political culture is potentially a powerful, unifying concept of political science (Chilton, 1988). Almond and Verba (1963). in their analysis of political culture identified three ways through which culture shapes political participation: first, they argue that in a parochial political culture citizens are largely informed about their government and take little interest in the process; secondly, subjective political culture, citizens are somewhat informed and aware of their governments and occasionally participate and finally, a participant political culture citizens are both aware and informed and as such, participate in political decision-making process. Almond and Verba concluded that participation shapes outcomes. Studies on the extent to which culture influences regime outcomes in a scientific, cross-cultural valid form (Well, 1990) found three broad outcomes: (1) Political culture plays a major role in determining political structures and regime outcomes (Almond & Verba 1963). (2) Political culture plays no role - it follows from structures and institutions (Barry 1970). (3) Political culture and structures affect each other mutually (Almond 1980). Although, formalizing and operationalising the concept might require new methods, new data, and new theories, the concept itself seemed unproblematic. Political culture today deals with citizen's behaviours in relations to political development and governance in human society. It is one of the most intellectually stimulating approaches to understanding people and politics in a context.

Political cultures connect to notions of identity, citizenship and nationalism, that is, what separates "Nigerians" from "South Africans", or how Congo differs from Egypt. These concepts have implications on unilateralism, multilateralism and international relations. Economic development or otherwise can also be rationalized in the context of political culture. (Inglehart, 1988) connected Protestant work ethics to capitalism and economic development, arguing that Western civilization and its attendant global appeal is rooted in a culture that facilitated its emergence.

Theoretical Review

The paper sees validity in the sociological theory of voting pattern and so adopts it as a road map to investigating voting pattern in the third world communities The theoretical assumptions of the sociological theory of voting pattern and behaviour have their foundation in 'The People's Choice'. It is a study carried out by Lazarsfeld et al. in 1944.

The initial assumption which drove the study was that the act of voting is personal and is influenced by the disposition of the voter and how conversant he is with the sources of relevant political information including the media, peer groups and other social groups. Findings from the study proved that the influence of social groups which individuals belong to largely determined voters' choice and not the media (Antunes, 2010). In other words, findings from the study showed that social and cultural environments are the deciding factors which influence voting pattern and behaviour of a group of people. Thus, this indicates that there exists a strong correlation between an individual's social group and his electoral behaviour. This was evident in the research when close to 80 per cent of first-time voters voted in line with their parents (Lazarsfeld et al., 1944). The main thesis of the sociological theory of voting pattern and behaviour, therefore, is that an individual's electoral choice is largely conditioned by the individual's membership of a particular social group and the social position of the group within the larger society (Andersen and Yaish, 2003).

Third world communities and the nature of voting pattern in Nigeria

The term third world was originally coined by French historian Alfred Sauvy in 1952, which was part of "three worlds". Label system used to describe a country's political alliance. However, the falling of the Soviet Union brought about the change in the meaning of third world countries and the end of cold war in the 1990s. "Third world" lost its political root and came to refer to economically poor and non-industrialised countries as well as newly industrialised countries which further term these countries exhibiting economic, social, and environmental issues such as high rate of poverty, economic instability and dearth of essential human resource compare to the rest of the world. This is a clear definition of Nigeria today, with a dwindling economic policies, decay in social norms and poor hygienic environment worse of all near collapse of human capital development.

The nature of the Nigerian voting pattern

Hoffman and Long, 2013, employed two broad approaches to voting pattern; first, they identify ethnic affiliation as a powerful determinant of voting pattern and choice in multi-ethnic and new democracies, that ethnicity conditions voter choice in such democracies. For them, ethnicity offer bonds of identity and which are strong enough to cause anxiety of out group members and positive evaluation of in group members regardless of what members do in office. This is typical of the Nigerian scenario where

an ethnic or regional group sees state power as owns 'birthright' failure to acquire and maintain such power leads to social disorder and threat of succession.

The second approach according to (Hoffman and Long: 2013, p.128) "That distribution of goods, including patronage and services in poor multi-ethnic democracies primarily follows ethnic and religious lines".

Horowitz (1983), cited in Hoffman and Long, 2013), noted that, voters may vote for candidates from their ethnic group based on common positive evaluations of members from the same ethnic group, thus votes are cast to show electoral support which is derivative of social group or ethnic affinity. This assertion was further solidify by (Dickson and Schere, 2006) where they opined that voters may tend to vote for a candidates from their ethnic groups in order to secure themselves against unfavourable consequences of governance spearheaded by another ethnic group as well as voters expectation of patronage and social goods from candidates of their ethnic group.

This notion of voting pattern has been found to be the basis of patronage and clientelism in the third world countries. Patronage and clientelism have been identify by scholars as strategies employed by African politicians to distributes social and public goods and services in favour of members of same ethnic groups (Hoffman, 2009, Howitz 2001; Bratton and Van de Walle, 1994). This situation is underscored by patron-client and neo-patrimodialism. (Hoglong, 2009), noted that patrimodialism and neo-patrimodialism are prevalent phenomena in third world political sphere.

This is a clear definition of Nigerian political elite who term themselves "god fathers" that seek and acquire power by propaganda and ethnic or religious affinity. The 2015, 2019 and 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria symbolises neo-patrimodialism which gave birth to the concept of "Emilokon (it is my turn) prior to 2022 APC Presidential primaries in June, 2nd 2022; and further in Abeokuta Ogun state while addressing delegate before the APC Presidential primaries that (it is the turn of Yoruba. It is my turn). (Channels TV, March, 2023). Tinubu further added that "I have served for over 25 years and helped many achieved their political ambition" he told Governor Dapo Abiodun" go and check the video, they did not want to hand over the party's flag to him as the APC flag bearer for the 2019 gubernatorial elections in Ogun" and boosted that "if not for me that stood solidly behind Buhari and encouraged him to go ahead. He could not have become president" say Tinubu (Vanguard. June, 2022)

Similarly, Atiku Abubakar, the PDP Presidential flag bearer in the 2023 general election was quoted to have said " I think what an average northerner needs is somebody from the north who understands other parts of Nigeria and who has been able to build bridges across the country. That is what the north needs." He added that "it (northern Nigeria)

doesn't need a Yoruba candidates or an Igbo candidate. This is what the northerners need. So I believe I stand before you as a pan-Nigerian of Northern origin" (Ahmed, 2024).

The statements above justifies the researcher's questions of how informed are the citizenry of the third world communities like Nigeria knew their political right of choice? What then defines the Nigerian political culture? Has propaganda taken hold of the popular will? Or has populism strive against elitist dominant in governance?

The paper expounded that Nigerians are negatively informed of their political right where real issues of governance are mostly unattended by those in governance instead they used socio-cultural (religion, ethnicity, women right, regional tie) to affect voting pattern of the electorate to enhance the interest of the elite.

Further more, the paper discovered that the Nigerian political culture is parochial in nature where citizens are largely informed about their government but take little interest in the process (in put and out put mechanism). Since parochialism is the new normal, propaganda was discovered to have become a useful tool in electioneering campaign in the just concluded 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. While populism peril the Nigerian democratic domain as an alternative means of acquiring political power by populist.

Conclusion/Recommendations

This paper "an appraisal of the sociological factors of voting pattern in the third world communities: the Nigerian case was conducted to uncover the extent to which political processes and political culture had shapes the voting pattern in the third world communities. Diligently, the researchers outline a valid objective in ensuring the process is not misguided. Been a content review, themes and relevant literature were consulted as an enhancer to credible outcome, this has yielded result because it was found out that voting pattern in the Nigerian electoral system is eroded with parochial political culture as such ethnic favouritism, religious sentiment, deft of public money, social disorder are branded 'good governance'

The paper therefore, recommends that an informed political ethics or objective electoral act devoid of elitist interest be enacted so as to cope, parochialism in the political culture of the third world communities like Nigeria. More so, further research can be conducted on the topic so as to have another dimension to the sociological factors of voting pattern in the third world communities.

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