



PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES AS PREDICTORS OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS

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ABSTRACT

This study examined psychological and socio-demographic variables as predictors of youth participation in politics. A total number of three hundred youths was selected by the researchers for the study using stratified sampling. The study adopted ex-post facto design. The mean age and standard deviation of participant were 26.5year and 6.5. Two hypotheses were formulated and tested: the results showed that political consciousness and political self-efficacy jointly predicted youth participation in politics ($R = .95$; $R^2 = .91$; $p < .05$). The study also revealed that socio-economic status ($\beta = -.010$, $p < .01$), religion ($\beta = -.064$, $p < .01$) and educational qualifications ($\beta = .099$, $p < .01$) respectively predicted youth participation in politics. Recommendations were made by the researcher at the end of the study.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

People's participation in politics has been a central idea in research on political systems, liberal democracy in particular, since early 1960s. Rosenstone and Hansen (2003), in their recent work on political participation in America, offered what they described as an 'expansive definition' wherein these researchers opined that "political participation is action directed explicitly toward influencing the distribution of social goods and values". Consequently, the importance of political engagement in a participatory democracy is widely accepted, with many observers denouncing what they see as the low rate of participation among younger generations (Jarvis, Montoya & Mulvoy, 2005). The low rates of participation among the poor and lower class, though less often discussed, is also troublesome; in both instances, weak levels of engagement affect policymaking, lowering the chances of group's interests being adequately represented in government.

There has also been very little research done on young people with regards to electoral engagement. Research has found that young people are much less likely to be on the electoral roll in America (Print, Sana and Edwards, 2004). These researchers found that only 50 percent of young people said they would vote if voting were not compulsory. However, if we extend our definition of political participation, the picture becomes brighter. In taking a broader view of political participation, Vromen (2003) found that while young people were generally disengaged from electoral forms of participation, they were actually highly engaged in non-electoral forms of participation. Nonetheless it is believed that people engaged themselves by learning to involved or participate in politics as it was claim by social learning theorist. Youths are expected to have profited from the experience they have had within their environment which invariably is a product of learning either from parents, peer and media. Norris (2002) also criticizes research on political participation for being excessively narrow in its conception of what constitutes political participation (Hooghe, 2004). According to this researcher, analysis of protest politics shows that many forms of activity such as petition signing, demonstrations, and consumer boycotts have become increasingly popular in recent decades (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Rucht, 2007). Researchers routinely included group consciousness as a key variable in the analyses of political participation and policy preferences.

There is still a shortage of research that breaks down these non-electoral forms of participation among specific age groups. Assessing diverse form of political actions, Marsh and Kaase (1999a) argued that new forms of activity such as attending a demonstration may be particularly attractive to the young as they offer 'the kinds of satisfaction beyond those attainable through conventional pathways of political action'. These researchers found evidence that the young-adults were more likely to engage in protest activities and noted that this was not a lifecycle but a generational change. They argued that changes in attitudes and values 'have fueled, facilitated, and shaped radical changes in political behaviour in the last ten to fifteen years' (Marsh and Kaase 1999b).

Conversely, others researchers (Putnam 2000; Blais 2002; & Gidengil 2003) have argued that non-electoral participation is not becoming more widespread among the young. The international research cited above leads us to expect that young people would be less engaged in electoral politics (in terms of their attitudes towards voting and parties and being a party member). Conversely, the international literature on non-electoral participation would lead us to expect that young people will be more engaged in non-electoral forms of participation such as attending a demonstration and boycotting consumer products. To this end, research evidence shows electoral participation to be declining. For example, Putnam's (2000) research found steeply declining levels of participation in the US as does Stoker (2006) in Britain. This is particularly the case with regards to political parties and participation in electoral system. This researcher reported that American youths were half as likely to work for a political party in the 1990s as in the 1970s (see also Dalton, Scarrow and Cain, 2004) This invariably shows that party membership and active participation in politics has declined in many advanced countries.

These trends have been found to be particularly pronounced among the young at several levels. Putnam (2000) finds generational declines in electoral forms of political activity. Attitudes towards voting are generally held to be an important element of political participation (Dalton, 2008). The international literature shows young people to be much disengaged in terms of their attitudes towards voting. Blais (2004) found that the current generation of young people have a weaker sense of duty and are less likely to see voting as an obligation. Related to these attitudes, research shows that in many advanced democracies, young people are voting at ever-lower numbers (Wattenberg, 2002, 2006; Phelps, 2005; Fieldhouse, 2007). In relation to parties, it is the young in particular who are less likely to become party members. Youth sections of political parties, once very important, are now on the brink of disappearing (Hooghe, 2004) and evidence suggests that young people are opting out of party membership in Canada (Blais, 2002) and Europe (Haerpfer, Wallace and Spanring, 2006).

The data cited above painted a very pessimistic picture of political participation; one that Dalton (2008) argues is unduly pessimistic. Central to the good citizen thesis is the need to look outside of electoral engagement. This researcher criticized the literature for concentrating on a narrow range of political participation. Vromen (2003), argue that non-electoral forms of participation such as protesting, petitioning and boycotting are often overlooked giving an unduly pessimistic picture of political participation. The decline of voting turnout and disengagement in political groups, particularly in developing countries, is interpreted as the main malady of a modern, democratic state. Verba and Nie (2002) described this as phenomenon "where few take part in decisions, there is little democracy". Recently, a lot of effort has been made to understand the worldwide erosion in political participation (Pippa 2009, Klingeman & Fuchs 2005).

The impact of group consciousness on youths' political behavior first began to draw serious attention from political scientists in early studies of participation among blacks and whites. Whites on average proved to be significantly more active in politics than blacks. This finding was hardly surprising; after all, whites have a greater share of socio-economic resources like education and income that are known to facilitate political engagement and activity. More remarkable was the discovery that blacks appeared to participate at higher rates than whites after controlling for differences in socioeconomic status (Orum 2006). Studies of the civil rights movement, for example, suggested that group consciousness helped galvanize thousands of disadvantaged African- American youths to engage in collective action to demand equal rights (Chong, 1991). Researchers consequently hypothesized that a pronounced group consciousness among African Americans gave them an additional or alternative source of motivation to engage in political activity, beyond the standard socioeconomic resources.

The experience of citizen's participation in electoral politics in Nigeria generally has not been encouraging. Even where the local participation is an important tool of rural development and where political education cum mass participation is a key element of the development strategy. Quite a lot of strategies have been developed to encourage genuine participation among people, particularly the youth. Government, through its agencies which include National Orientation Agency (NOA), Not too young to run political enlightenment launch by the present civilian administration and other Public Media, not only to sensitize people generally, but to encourage the younger generation to participate actively in politics as leaders of tomorrow. It would be observed that there is general apathy in terms of the extent of participation of youth in politics. Aside from manipulation and "godfatherism" which pervade Nigerian politics, the personality characteristics of the youths would in a way be implicated in political participation. There has been dearth of literature on personality characteristics of participants in political activities due to very little research done on this issue. Therefore, this study strives to understand the dimension of youth participation in political activities in terms of their political self efficacy, consciousness and socio-demographic characteristics.

Empirical Studies

Previous studies of political voting behavior have clearly established the positive link between socio-economic status and political participation. Walsh, Jennings, and Stoker (2004) specifically examine the links between class identification and political participation across several decades, and found that those declaring themselves as working class have consistently displayed significantly lower level of political engagement than their higher class counterparts. Similarly, the link between educational attainment and higher participation is also well-established. Milbrath and Goel (2003) also found that those with higher class status and income are more likely to engage politically as a result of greater resources, greater opportunity, and social norms which encourage such behavior. More so than anything else, level of education has been found to shape social and political participation. Highly educated people are more likely to vote (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1992) compared to those with lower educational attainment. Higher level of education is also associated with greater propensity to join voluntary associations (Guterbock & Fries, 1997). Educated people are more likely to volunteer (Wilson and Musik, 1997) and to give to charity (Reed & Selbee, 2002).

Putnam (2000) argues that education is the strongest predictor of civic engagement, though Verba (1995) rank it somewhat lower (behind interest in politics, civic skills, and information). Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) find education

considerably more important for participation in government (writing Congress and attending a meeting) than for electoral politics. Researchers cast group consciousness as a concept more applicable for understanding participation among blacks because of their long history of disadvantage relative to whites. In their analysis of a 1967 national survey, Verba and Nie (2002) found that blacks who evinced racial consciousness in the manner they discussed political issues were more likely to participate in politics than non-rationally conscious blacks and whites of similar socioeconomic status. Olsen (1970) subsequently corroborated this result in finding that blacks who expressed racial identification participated at higher levels than whites across a variety of political activities after controlling for education and income.

Putnam (2000) argues that age is the second strongest predictor of participation in general (ranking only behind education). Rosenstone and Hansen (2002) found overwhelming age effects for turnout, though less powerful ones for governmental participation. Young people are less involved in virtually every type of social and political engagement. Young people are noted not to have established roots in their communities. They move more often, so they do not devote time to become informed on local issues. They generally make less money than older people, so their stake in politics is less (Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980). Older people are more likely to make donations to charity (Jencks, 1987). Young people today are even less participatory than the way their cohorts were several decades ago. If there has been a drop in some forms of civic engagement, it is largely attributable to the drop-off in participation by younger people. Rosenstone and Hansen (2002) reported that 17% of the decline in US electoral turnout from 1960 to 1988 can be attributed to generational change: Older people, who had high level of participation die and are replaced in the potential electorate by younger cohorts who opt out of political life. Putnam (2000) argues that they have dropped out of almost all forms of civic engagement. Nonetheless, it is not surprising that attitudinal variables will outperform demographic variables (Achen 1992) in political participation. Miller (2000) reports on political participation are considered biased because of specification error arising from the omission of political efficacy from the model.

METHOD

Design

This study adopted ex-post facto design for data collection. The independent variables are psychological and socio-demographic variables which include political self-efficacy and consciousness, socio-economic status, educational attainment and religion while the dependent variable is youths' participation in politics.

Setting

This study was conducted within Lagos metropolis using youths in four local government areas (Ojo, Ikeja, Alimosho and Ikeja Local Governments) within "the heart" of the city.

Participant and Sampling technique

The participant for the study which consisted of three hundred youths was selected by the researchers from among young-adult residing within the selected local government areas using stratified sampling. The participant was selected across diverse demographic characteristics which included sex, religion and educational qualification. This comprised of young-adults who fall within the age range of 18 and 35years. Out of the three hundred participants, 182(61.0%) of the respondents were males, while 118(39.0%) of them were

females, 123(35.5%) of the respondents were single, 125(38.5%) of them were Married, 33(16.5%) of the respondents had separated, also, 19(9.5%) of them had divorced. In terms of religion, 186(53.0%) of the respondents were Christians, 114(47.0%) of them were Muslims.

Instrument & Psychometric Properties

The researchers developed structured questionnaire for data collection. The questionnaire was divided into four sections;

Section A: This section consists of the socio-demographic variables such as age, sex, religion, educational status and socio-economic status.

Section B: This section consists of 12 items people's participation in politics scale. The scale was developed by the Jennis and Reus (1984). Each respondent was asked to respond to the item of the scale base on YES or NO response format. The cronbach alpha coefficient of the scale is 0.83, while the cronbatch alpha of the scale in current research is 0.79

Section C: This section consists of 5-items political consciousness scale developed by Jennis and Rogers (1984). The scale was designed to measure political consciousness among group of people. Each respondent was asked to respond to the items of the scale base on YES or NO response format. The cronbach alpha coefficient of the scale is 0.63, while the cronbach alpha of the scale in current research is 0.71

Section D: This section consists of 3-item political self-efficacy scale. The scale was designed to measures peoples' political self-efficacy among people. It was developed by Jennis and Reus (1984). Each respondent was asked to respond to the item of the scale using likert rating scale. The cronbach alpha coefficients is 0.83, while the cronbach alpha of the scale in current research is 0.86

Statement of Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are put forward for testing:

- i. Consciousness and political self-efficacy will jointly and independently predict youths' participation in politics.
- ii. Socio-economic status, religion, sex and educational attainment will predict youths' participation in politics.

RESULTS

The hypothesis which stated that political self-efficacy and group consciousness will independently and jointly predict youth's participation in politics was tested using Multiple Regression and the result is presented in table 1:

Summary Table of Multiple Regression showing the prediction of youth participation in politics by political consciousness and political self efficacy.

Predictors	β	t	P	R	R^2	F	P
Group Consciousness	.26	4.47	<.01	.95	.91	18.92	<.05
Pol. Self-efficacy	.01	4.75	>.05				

The result on the table above shows that political consciousness and political self-efficacy jointly predicted youths' participation in politics ($R = .95$; $R^2 = .91$; $p < .05$). The total *linear contribution* of all predictors accounted for 91%. The result further shows the *relative contribution* of each of the independent variables on the dependent variable: political

consciousness ($\beta = .26, p < .01$) and political self- efficacy ($\beta = .01, p > .05$) on youth participation in politics. Therefore the stated hypothesis was partially confirmed.

The hypothesis which stated that socio-economic status, age, religion, sex and educational qualifications will predict youths' participation in politics was tested using simple linear regression and the result presented in table 2

Table 2: Summary table of Simple Linear Regression showing influence of Socio-economic status, Religion, Sex and Educational Qualification on Youth Participation in Politics

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error		
1	(Constant)	2.063	.077	26.886	
	Socio-economic status	-.010	.018	.549	<.05
	Religion	-.064	.040	-1.581	<.01
	Sex	-.110	.122	1.435	>.05
	Educational Qualif.	.099	.021	1.032	<.01

R = .41, R² = .17

The result in the table shows the various *relative contributions* of: socio-economic status ($\beta = -.010, p < .01$), religion ($\beta = -.064, p < .01$), sex ($\beta = .110, p > .05$) and educational qualifications ($\beta = .099, p < .01$) respectively. It is shown that while socio-economic status, religion and educational qualification were found to have significantly predicted political participation, sex was not.

DISCUSSION

The first hypothesis which stated that political self-efficacy and political consciousness will independently and jointly predict youth participation in politics was partly confirmed. This finding is partly consistent with the result of National Survey conducted by Verba, Nie and Olsen (2002) on group consciousness and political participation among youths wherein these researchers reported that blacks who expressed racial identification participated at higher level across a variety of political activities after controlling for education and income. Furthermore, political self-efficacy did not predict youth participation in politics. This is however surprising in the sense that one would expect individuals who are politically self-efficacious to participate actively in politics. On the contrary, this finding presupposes that the political system of the country may actually be a militating factor against youth in particular who have personal belief in their capacity to make success politically.

The hypothesis which stated that socio-economic status, sex, religion and educational qualification will predict youth participation in politics was partly accepted. The finding showed that socio-economic status, religion and educational qualification were good predictors of youth participation in politics while sex did not significantly predict participation in politics. This finding is partly consistent with results of previous studies of political behavior which clearly established positive link between socio-economic status and political participation (Walsh, Jennins and Stoker, 2004; Milbrath and Goel (2005). These researchers found that those with higher class status and income are more likely to engage in politics as a result of greater resources, greater opportunity, and social



norms which encourage such behaviour. The finding is also supported by the report of survey conducted by Rosenstone and Hansen (2003) on peoples' participation in politics in America wherein these researchers reported decline in turnout for voting in America from 1960 to 1988. This was attributed to generational change: Older people, who had high level of participation died and were replaced by electorates by younger cohorts who opted for career in political sphere.

Conclusion

This study examined psychological and socio-demographic variables as predictors of youth participation in politics. The study tested two hypotheses and found that there is significant independent and joint prediction of youth participation in politics by political consciousness and political self-efficacy. The study also observed significant influence of socio-economic status, religion and educational qualification on political participation among youths.

Recommendation

People's participation in politics is a crucial issue in the development of a nation. And it is obvious that an enduring and stable democratic government will impact positively not only on masses in developing countries but also increase peoples' participation in governance. For this reason, government at various levels should be more pro-active by embarking on more enlightenment and educative strategies so as to empower not only the youth but also adults on the need to brace up for challenges of life and their responsibility to the society.

Limitation of study

Like any other research work, this study is limited not only in terms of time and financial resources. Aside from this, there is need for further research efforts to examine correlates of political participation among youths and adults and also compare level of political participation between the youth and the adults. Furthermore, there is also the need to further examine the nature of relationship between political self efficacy and people's participation in politics.

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