

VOTERS APATHY DURING STUDENTS' UNION ELECTIONS: IMPLICATION FOR SOCIAL STUDIES AND POLITICAL SCIENCE STUDENTS

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Abstract

The study assesses the implication of voter apathy during students' union elections on Social Studies and Political Science Students. Three (4) research questions were raised and answered in the study. The study adopted descriptive research design. The target population of the study consists of all Social Studies and Political Science of Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun, Ogun State. Six hundred and twenty (620) students were selected for the study, using purposive and stratified random sampling techniques. A self-designed questionnaire tagged "Students and Voting Apathy Questionnaire" (SVAQ) was used to obtain information from the respondents. The data were analysed using descriptive analysis of frequency,

percentage mean and standard deviation. The finding showed that voting apathy among social studies and political science students during students' union elections is unabated; popular students inclination that voting during students' union election is voluntary exercise; that students have negative perception about candidates fulfilling their electoral promises; and that Social Studies and Political Science have influence on students active participation and voting during student unions' election. The study recommended that voting during students' union election should be made compulsory for the students of Social Studies and Political Science and that management of higher institution of learning must adopt e-voting to de-radicalise students' election and enhance active participation of students' confidence of students in voting during student union election.

Key words: Voter apathy, Student union, Election, Social Studies, Political Science

Introduction

Globally, the roles of students of students' umbrella body in the annals of nation- building have been well documented. Within political spectrum of states, they have advocated for good governance and have equally engaged in policy dialogue with authority of higher institutions for better students' welfare. As noted by Oyekanmi and Adebajo (2023) the importance of students in nation-building have earned them the appellation of the "conscience of the nation". It is noteworthy to situate that these roles are performed under a student elected body knowing as students' union, acting for the interests of all.

Thus, students' union represents the highest governing body of the students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The students' union serves as the link between the school management and the student's populace. The union serves as an avenue for students to seek for the representation of the student's populace in the tertiary institution in Nigeria. Elections of representatives into the students' union executive or legislative arm are conducted through democratic process, wherein all the students are eligible to vote during the election. Student's involvement in the political process is essential for student's representative to be viable and meaningful. Oluwagbohunmi (2020) asserts that an election in which a large number of people refuse to participate may not reflect the will of the people. Election is an important aspect of democratic process. Elections provide the avenue by which a candidate can lay claims to power. Election gives the students the opportunity to select their representatives and choose their leaders directly or indirectly (Nu'man, 2012, Sobowale & Ngbarabara, 2023). Election plays an important role in process of selecting leaders in any democratic setting. Therefore it's expected that all students must participate in the selection of the student's union leadership.

Recent political happenings within the tertiary institutions in Nigeria have shown that students have lost interest in participating in electoral process during the student's union election. This has manifested in decline in the number of students that turn out to vote during the students' union elections in Nigeria's tertiary institutions. Low turnout during student unions' elections has become a serious concern that calls for urgent action if the nation is serious about improving the levels of political participation at the general elections. It is worrisome that students of Social Studies and Political Science whose courses dealt with raising the civic consciousness of the people to participate actively democratic processes are now part of the student's that refuses to participate actively in campus politics and associated elections, despite being exposed to the integral value of electoral participation as an inalienable civic duty during their course of studies. The unabated growth of voting apathy among the two mentioned social science students have become worrisome, to the attention of scholars in the field of Social Studies and Political Science. Students demonstrating what has been learnt practically are one of the means of measuring the achievements of the set objectives for the two courses. If political apathy continues as political anathema, it means that the salient objective of Social Studies and Political Science aimed at raising politically conscious students has not yet been achieved and thus, with negative implications on national development. Basics question that comes to mind are; could it mean that union election are dysfunctional, ineffective, not transparent and fair to all? Going by the prevailing voting apathy during the students' union election in the tertiary institution

in Nigeria, it's difficult to classify the leaders that emerges during the students' union election as the choice of the majority of the students as high turnout of the electorate in a democratic process is taken as evidence of the legitimacy of election and its outcome (Chinweuba & Ezeugwu, 2022). Practicing what is been taught in the classroom should be encouraged among the student's. Institutionalize compulsory voting for students of Social Studies and Political Science will improve their levels of political consciousness and result in high turnout. This is capable of preparing them for more demanding public service after graduation. This study, an assessment of voting apathy during student's union election and it's implication on Social Studies and Political Science students is undertaking to provide new policy paradigms to solve the evolving challenges.

Literature Review

Election is a process of choosing a leader that occupies official position (Alemka & Omotosho, 2018). In a country such as Nigeria, election implies a process which allows adult citizens who are 18years and above to be part of the leadership selection process in the country. The electoral process could be through the secret ballot system, raising of hands to indicate support for a candidate or standing at the back of the poster or aspirants in the election. The candidate with the highest total vote cast will be declare as the winner and becomes the representative of the people in government. Within the school system election is the process whereby the student elect their representatives and leaders to serve as a bridge between the students and the university administrators. Election is acceptable as one of the democratic means through which eligible voters in a country participate actively in politics. Election is a political process through which eligible citizens select the leaders of the society and their representatives in government (Chinweuba & Ezeugwu, 2022). Election serves as a platform through citizens made their opinion on the choice of leaders they desired to run the affairs of their society. Through election therefore the citizen opinion on who should lead them are made. In addition election has become an instrument which citizen used to effect democratic changes in their society (Ezirim, et al., 2011). Election gives the citizen the opportunity of participating in government, exercises their political rights and makes their opinion count on who will be their leader and representative (Ashindorbe, 2018).

Voter apathy occurs when voters become disinterested in the outcome of any election. It is an expressed behavior lacking the motivation to influence the winner or loser in any contest, which thus translates into very low voter turnout (Balogun & Nwakwo, 2023). Voter apathy means indifference of the electorate towards electoral processes as well as lack of interest in, or concern about electoral process (Yakubu, 2012; Balogun & Nwakwo, 2023). Oluwagbohunmi (2020) have observed that at during the general elections a large number of Nigeria citizens mostly the elites have lost interest in voting and have left the exercise for artisans whom also engaged in it due to what they will gain inform of inducement before voting. Most Nigerians prefer staying indoors during the period of election and this has established the fact that political apathy is on the increase during the general elections in Nigeria (Agba, 2011; Falade, 2010). Voter apathy can therefore means citizens indifference and display of nonchalant attitude by majority of the eligible citizen towards the issues relating to political activities. Voter apathy occurred in the school system when majority of the student are not interested in political participation in the student's union activities and thus refuses to participate in student's union election.

One of the major civic obligations of citizen is to vote during election. Political consciousness is a skill that all students that will become major player in the political decision in future must imbibed, therefore student's participation in student's union election is a civic responsibilities of the students within the campus. Where most of the students fail to participate in the political process such decision will allow incompetent leaders to emerge. Voter apathy have been experience in the general election in Nigeria due to decline public interest on the electoral results showing the true opinion of the electorates. However, electoral apathy is not peculiar to the general election in Nigeria, within the tertiary institutions in Nigeria the eligible voters who participated in the student's union election are mostly within 10 – 20% of total student population. For instance taking Tai Solarin University of Education student's union election as case study in 2020/2021 session 2952 students voted out 27188 students representing 10.86% of students

population, in 2021/2022 session 2736 students voted out of 26650 representing 10.27% of students population, in 2022/2023 session 3476 voted out of 27729 representing 12.53% of students population. This showed a clear issue of voter apathy on part of the student.

Balogun and Nwakwo (2023) stressed that lack of interest in the candidates that are running in an election, general feelings that votes cast doesn't count and distrust on electoral process are one of the major causes of voters apathy among the students. In addition, factors such as political thuggery, intimidation, believe that votes would not count, insecurity at polling units, vote buying, election rigging, result manipulation and destruction of election materials, lack of trust in government, failure to fulfill electioneering promises, eleventh hour postponement, declaring election inconclusive and delay in release of election results are among the factors that are responsible for political apathy (Oluwagbohunmi, 2020). Also, election rigging, popular beliefs that votes don't count, lack of credible candidates, current condition of governance, lack of trust in governance, campaign violence, chaos in the political system and negative media coverage are the major causes of electoral apathy in Nigeria (Balogun & Nwakwo, 2023). Several factors such as broad psychological factors and collective memory of historical and contemporary events, patterns of trust, and feelings of efficacy, political engagement and disengagement at individual, group and regional levels have been identified as major reasons for political apathy (INEC, 2011). Nwambuko, et al., (2024) highlighted bad governance, high level illiteracy and ignorance, pronounced rigging and snatching of ballot boxes, victimization of political opponents, lack of proper accountability, voter fatigue, financial inducement vote will not count mentality as the major causes of voter apathy in Nigeria. Other reasons for voter apathy include violation of human rights, lack of transparency, unpopular public policies, programmes and projects, low political participation, timid patriotism to national issues, non-adherence to due process, non-adherence to the principle of rule of law, politicization of security outfits and corrupt judicial system as the consequences of voter apathy on Nigerian national development (Nwambuko, 2024). Chinweuba and Ezeugwu (2022) suggested that electoral apathy in Nigeria is due to mistrust of the outcome of the election by Nigerians, lack of confidence in the electoral process, perception of Nigerian on election becoming business of party loyalists and political cabals, rigging, manipulations, malpractices and violence. These factors scare people away from the polls, and prevent them from exercising their fundamental rights of choosing their leaders through their ballots.

In a study conducted at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, South Africa by Breakfast, et al., (2017), it was found that young people in post-apartheid South Africa have no interest in politics which suggests that political apathy does exist amongst the students. Oluwagbohunmi (2020) examine causes of political apathy as perceived by secondary school teachers and suggest remedies to the menace. Finding revealed that teachers perceived all forms of electoral malpractice and bad governance as some of the causes of political apathy. Also, good governance/leadership and enabling environment for free and fair election among others are perceived as remedies to political apathy in Nigeria and no significant difference in the causes of political apathy as perceived by male and female secondary school teachers were recorded. Chinweuba and Ezeugwu (2022) study assess critical analysis of voter apathy in Nigeria. Results show that most voters rarely acquire permanent voters' cards (PVC) and eligible ones rarely cast their votes in past Nigerian elections. Nwambuko, et al., (2024). The paper examines voter apathy in Nigerian electoral democracy as an insidious enigma to national development, with an emphasis on the 2023 General Elections. Findings revealed factors such as bad governance, high level illiteracy and ignorance, pronounced rigging as the major causes of voters' apathy in Nigerian electoral democracy and violation of human rights, lack of transparency, unpopular public policies and programmes and projects, as the consequences on the country's national development

Theoretical Review

This study adopted the theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) postulated by Ajzen (1975). The proponent speculated that planned behaviors are determined by behavioural intentions which are largely influenced

by an individual attitude towards a behaviour. Behaviour are at times planned before execution and it's based on behavioural intention (Ajzen, 1985). This supports the views of Heider (1958) who is of the opinion that most human behaviour is goal-directed. TPB is a psychological theory that is used to understand and predict behaviour (Caso et al., 2023). The theory of planned behaviour suggests that components of planned behaviour (attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control) shape human behavioural intention and behavioural intention determine human social behaviour (Ajzen, 2019; Bosnjak et al., 2020). The most predictor of behaviour is an individual intention to perform or not to perform it. Despite the potential of the planned behaviour to predict human behaviour, the theory failed to identify factors from which the determinants of the behaviour originated from (Chatzisarantis, 2007). Caso et al., (2020); Bosnjak et al., (2020) and Haruna, et al., (2024) have used the theory of planned behaviour to exploit the potential of the TPB to promote Mediterranean diet, examine factors influencing financial inclusion participation behaviour and assess the influence of TPB on selected advance applications. The relationship between the TPB and voter apathy is that theory can be used to study and determine factors that influence students' decision, participation and involvement in students' union election.

Statement of the Problem

Studies have shown that voter's turnout varies considerably overtime within different set of elections and places. Despite the importance of electing credible leaders to represent the interest of the students during students' union election, voters turn-out has continued to decline in most tertiary institution. Students have in most cases show lack of interest in electoral process and on Election Day. Social Studies and Political Science students have acquired over time knowledge on the roles of citizen in participating in the electoral process and the needs for this set of students that are political conscious to play roles in enlightening citizen to vote during the election become paramount. Despite the knowledge and political participation skills that Social Studies and Political Science students have acquired in the course of their study, the students still sees voting during the student's union election as voluntary activities yet they refused to vote nor raise the consciousness of the students on seeing voting as civic duty of the students for responsible leader to emerge to represent students interest. Also, most of the available literatures on voter apathy are incidental to Nigeria's general election and not much has been done to assess voting apathy during students' union election. This study therefore assesses the voters apathy during the students union election and examine its implication on Social Studies and Political Science students.

Objectives of the Study

1. Assess the levels of voter apathy among Social Studies and Political Science students
2. Examine reasons for voter apathy among the students
3. Examine the influence of Social Studies and Political Science on students' political participation in the student union election.

Research Questions

1. What are the levels of voter's apathy of Social Studies and Political Science student's?
2. What are the reasons for political apathy among Social Studies and Political Science student's?
3. Do Social Studies and Political Science have influence on students on political participation?

Method and Materials

Study Design

The study employed the descriptive research design. This design helps to get the views of the students on voter's apathy during students' union election.

Population of the Study

Population of this study comprises of all the three thousand six hundred and ninety two (3,692) Social Studies and Political Science students of Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun, Ogun state. The population was selected because the study is interested in assessing the views of Social Studies and Political Science students who have been expose to lessons on civic rights and responsibilities.

Sample and Sampling Procedure

Six hundred and twenty seven students (620) constitute the sample for the study. The departments are selected using purposive sampling procedure while stratified sampling technique was used to select the students for the study. The sample is appropriate because the study is interested in assessing voter apathy during student union election with implication on social studies and political science students who have been exposed to lessons on civic rights and responsibilities.

Instrumentation

The instrument used for this study was a self-structured questionnaire tagged “Student and Voters Apathy Questionnaire” (SVAQ). This is constructed from the research questions that were raised to be answered in the study. The instrument is made up of 14 items questionnaire. The instrument is based on two different likert scale of Yes and No and Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A) Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) based on the trends and parts of the questionnaire. The content and face validity of the questionnaire was established by presenting a copy of the draft questionnaire to two experts in the field of test and measurement for further scrutiny and modification. This was to ascertain the suitability of the instrument in terms of language, presentation, clarity and applicability. Based on their comments necessary modifications were made. Also, a field trial of the instruments was carried on randomly selected students living in non-residential tertiary institutions in another institution outside the study area. Split half was used to determine the reliability coefficient of the instrument which was found to be 0.85.

Data Analysis Procedure

Data collected were coded and analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation to describe the basic features of the data in the study.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the levels of voter apathy Social Studies and Political Science student’s?

Table 1: levels of voter apathy on Social Studies and Political Science student’s.

	Item	N	Yes	%	No	%
1.	I always vote during student union election	672	387	61.7	240	38.3
2.	I never voted in student union election	672	174	27.8	453	72.2

Table 1 above shows the respondents opinion on the levels of voter apathy on Social Studies and Political Science students. Three hundred and eighty seven (387) representing 61.7% of the respondents have always been voting during the student union election while one hundred and seventy four (174) representing 27.8% have never voted during the student union election. The implication of this is that the level of Social Studies and Political Science students’ participation during the student union election is high.

Research Question 2: What are the reasons for political apathy among Social Studies and Political Science student's

Table 2: Reasons for political apathy among Social Studies and Political Science student's

S/N	Items	N	Mean	SD
1.	Participating in student union election as voluntary exercise	627	4.07	.831
2.	Participating in student union election as a compulsory civic responsibility.	627	3.32	1.126
3.	Voting during student union election as a waste of time	627	2.24	.952
4.	Possibility that the election might be manipulated discouraged me from voting during student union election	627	3.55	1.091
5.	Lack of interest in the candidates running for student union election	627	3.45	1.060
6.	Distrust in the electoral process	627	3.64	.980
7.	The notion that candidates will not fulfill their electoral promise	627	3.66	1.065
Total Mean			3.41	.520

The result from table 2 shows the reasons for political apathy among Social Studies and Political Science student's. The total mean of 3.41(SD =.520) recorded is above the 2.5 mean benchmark for making decision in this study. This show that reasons such as students seeing participating in student union election as voluntary exercise and electorate haven the feeling that the candidate will not fulfill their electoral promises are the major reasons for political apathy among students of social studies and political sciences students. The standard deviation shows a high level of dispersion and closeness with the mean.

Research Question 3: Do Social Studies and Political Science have influence on students political participation?

Table 3: Influence of Social Studies and Political Science on students political participation?

S/N	Items	N	Mean	SD
1.	My course of study encourages me to vote during student union election	627	3.96	.956
2.	My choice of not participating in the student union election has nothing to do with my course of study.	627	3.54	1.087
3.	My course have change my attitude towards mobilising other students to vote during election	627	3.44	1.089

4.	Despite my course of study I do not see mobilizing student to participate in election as my civic responsibility.	627	3.09	1.137
5.	As a student of Social Studies and Political Science it is compulsory for me to vote during student union election.	627	3.62	1.099
Mean Total			3.53	0.495

The result from table 3 shows the influence of Social Studies and Political Science on students political participation. The total mean of 3.53(SD =.495) recorded is above the 2.5 mean benchmark for making decision in this study. This shows that social studies and political science have influenced student’s political participation.

Discussion of Findings

The study assesses the implication of voter apathy during students’ union election on Social Studies and Political Science students in tertiary institution in Ogun state. The findings of research question one showed that voter apathy among Social Studies and Political Science students during student union election is low. This finding supports the findings of Mogaladi and Mlambo (2022) who also found students voter apathy to be low in their study. However, the finding is in contrast with the findings of Marsuki et al., (2022) whose findings revealed high voter turnout of students during election. This finding in this study may be connected to the fact that the study is carried out among Social Studies and Political Science students who are based on their course of study are conscious to perform their civic duty of voting during the student union election. This might be due to their course of study which centered on producing active political citizen.

The finding of research question two shows that various reasons are responsible for political apathy among social studies and political science students during students’ union election. Factors such as students seeing participating in student union election as voluntary exercise and electorate haven the feeling that the candidate will not fulfill their electoral promises are the major reasons for political apathy among students of social studies and political sciences students. This result support the findings of Oluwagbohunmi (2020), Balogun et al., (2023) and Chinweuba and Ezeugwu (2022) who also found lack of credible candidates, mistrust in the outcome of the past election and manipulation of election results as reasons for voter apathy during the election. This finding might be due to the experience of the students during the student union election which has discussed some students from voting during student union election.

The finding of research question three shows that Social Studies and Political Science have influenced student’s political participation although there is still low level of students mobilizing voters during student union election despite their course of study. This finding is supported by the findings of Manuwa (2023), Ogundiran (2020) and Uzamere (2024) who find out the importance of social studies and civic education in motivating students to be an active citizen by performing their duties during election. This findings might be due to the fact that students sees voting during the students union election a their civic duty and mobilization should be the duty of the candidates and not part of their own duty as a Social Studies and Political Science students. The limitation of this study is that it limits its scope only to Social Studies and Civic Education Students and to one tertiary institution in Ogun state. This study is limited by its scope of covering only social studies and political science students.

Conclusion

The study assesses the implication of voter apathy during student’s union election on Social Studies and Political Science students in tertiary institution in Ogun state. The findings from the study lead to the following conclusion. Most of Social Studies and Political Science students vote during student union

election. This suggests that voter apathy is low among the Social Studies and Political Science students despite high evidence of voter apathy of all students in the union election. Also, student union perceiving participating in student union election as voluntary activities, mistrust in the electoral process, notion that candidates will not fulfill their electoral promise, student viewing participating in student union election as a waste of time and manipulation during previous election discourage me from voting during election are the major reasons for student voter apathy during student union election. This suggests that past experience of student form their views on the reasons for voter apathy among students during the student union election. Social Studies and Political Science influence student's choice of voting during the student union election and student course of study do not influence them to mobilize students to vote during student union election. This suggest that student course of study can influence their decision in carrying out their responsibility in the society.

Recommendations

1. To reduce voting apathy during students' union elections, the Department of Social Studies and Political Science should institute voting during students' union election as a compulsory curricular model. This is capable of integrating them into democratic firmaments, beyond abstract theorization of political sophistry.
2. Higher institutions in Nigeria should adopted e-voting model in the conduct of students' unions elections. This will help to de-escalate the usual electoral crisis, malfeasance and rigid procedures which often turn off prospective participants in students elections.
3. Social Studies and Political Science students should not only be participating during elections, they should be integrated into voters' mobilization exercise program of Independent National Electoral Commission in their bid to drive improved voters registration in Nigeria.

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