

Voter Apathy: A Psychometric Enabled Measurement

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Abstract- Voter apathy is a concept in political psychology that expresses the passivity or lack of interest of individuals in participating to choose their representative(s). Due to the absence of a psychometric enabled measure of voter apathy in Nigeria, this study developed a scale to measure the construct and assess the individual indisposition to performing their civic obligation. Two thousand three hundred and thirty one (2331) randomly selected respondents across the three senatorial districts of Lagos State with ages ranging from 20-65 years old, a mean age of 25.2 and standard deviation of 9.7 participated in the study. This is a 6-item scale in the Likert format of 5-point response options ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Result shows that the measure has content validity (using 80% agreements of experts). Reliability test revealed a Cronbach's coefficient alpha of .76 and the standardized item alpha of .76 and McDonald's test of .76. Guttman split-half coefficient is .74 with Correlation between forms of .60. Equal-length Spearman-Brown coefficient is .75 while Alpha for parts 1 and 2 were .62 and .68 respectively. The Statistical analysis also revealed significance of the KMO test at .82 and Bartlett's test ($\chi^2(78) = 3018.16, p < .001$) while communalities of variable's variability ranged between .34 and .57. Factor Analysis using principal component analysis (PCA) shows that all the items loaded as one factor with eigenvalue of 2.793 and cumulative percentage variance of 46.55. It was concluded that this scale is relevant in measuring the political tendency of individual in the discharge of their civic responsibility - voting in a democratic setting.

Indexed Terms- Lagos State, psychometric, reliability, validation, voter apathy.

I. INTRODUCTION

The legitimacy of any democratic governance is hinged on the popular choice made at the polls. Yet, there is the global awareness and indeed concern that participation in election is becoming a challenge. It depicts a situation where many citizens are indifferent to political activities to the extent that they are passive or even outrightly disinterested in choosing their representatives. This global phenomenon of low and/or unequal participation in election is a manifestation of political apathy. According to Mason et al (1991), political apathy is the absence of psychological involvement in public affairs, emotional detachment from civic obligations and withdrawal from political activity. Political apathy is caused by the inability of political leaders fulfilling promises, corruption, violence, thuggery, ignorance, poor or inordinate persuasion of the electorate, perceived irrelevance of voting among others (Agaigbe, 2015). Regrettably, political apathy metamorphosed into voter apathy – that aspect of voter behaviour that focuses on non-voting in an election.

Voter apathy connotes individual lacking the urge, affection or the will to participate in election and its process. It is the degree to which eligible citizenry decline to participate in an election. That is, the extent to which eligible voters deliberately for reasons best known to them fail to cast their vote during election. According to Idike (2014), poor political and voter education to the extent that voters do not know the importance of voting are the bane of voter apathy in Nigeria. While Ushie (2005) noted that poor participation in election in Nigeria is caused by how politics is being practiced. In Nigeria, politics is characterized by bitterness, acrimony and winner takes it all philosophy. This makes people to avoid politics and even political activities. Arolowo and Aluko (2010) argued that people do not have confidence and trust in their leaders and for as long

as the elected representatives' fails to fulfill promises; the voters have equally learned to abstain from voting on election day.

Voter apathy is reflected in poor or low voter turnout in election and produces result which does not reflect the "will" of the people and bring about unequal representation among various segments of the population. That is, elected rulers that are not citizenry preference. It is documented in the literature that there is relationship between voters' turnout and election result. Accordingly, the correlational studies carried out revealed wide relationship between voter turnout and election results (Fisher, 2007; Hill, 2010).

Although, voter apathy is caused by some citizens (eligible voters), its impact is felt by every citizen more when the competencies of those elected representatives are in doubt. This is a citizen deficit that exerts considerable influence on public policies. As reported, it has been clearly stated that there is a significant relationship between voters' turnout and public policies (Anzia, 2012; Fowler, 2012).

As the concern for voter apathy continues to rise despite its negative consequence of the people choice not being enthroned, it then means that there is something fundamentally wrong with the electoral process that had brought about alienation, indifference, disinterest, seclusion, illusion and in a way disenfranchised voters in a large number regardless of the age long belief that all human beings are political animals striving to either vote or be voted for.

It is in recognition of the above that this paper set out to develop a scale for measuring individual predisposition to voting apathy with a view to altering their mindset. The focus of this study therefore is the subjective measure of voter apathy; this is on the premise of the existence of individual differences on the performance of a given task notwithstanding, its direct impact on people involved. Similarly, voter apathy is prevalent in Nigeria politics and existing measure were developed in the western democracies which does not take into consideration our cultural orientation. Hence, the applicability of such measure in Nigeria context has serious concern for its validity. Therefore, this study is set out to

develop and validate Voter apathy scale that will be culture-relevant and local content based.

II. METHODS

This study adopts cross-sectional survey technique involving the administration of self-report questionnaire to participants across various strata.

Participants

Two thousand three hundred and thirty one (2331) respondents drawn from the three senatorial districts of Lagos State participated in this study. The sample was made up of males (51%) and females (49%) with ages ranging from 20-65, a mean age of 25.1 and standard deviation of 3.7. One of the inclusion criteria is that the respondents must be above 18 years of age; this is because 18 is the eligible year of voting in Nigeria. Also, participants must be able to read and write English which is the official language in the country.

Measure

Developing of a measure for voter apathy followed scientifically approved guidelines, and strict adherence to upholding psychological principle and ethical standard. The first step in the development of voter apathy scale was the generation of item by way of extensive search of the literature. This was complimented by asking people the probable reasons for not wanting to vote during election. With the adoption of this approach, a pool of 16 items were obtained which were then put into questionnaire form of YES or NO format and given to expert to rate the appropriateness of each item (Cronbach, 1971). From this process, 12 items with 80% and above support were retained and thereby establishing its content validity. Thereafter, all the 12 items were put in a questionnaire form using the Likert format with response option ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The items were positively worded and the scoring and interpretation dimension indicates that the higher the score, the higher the tendency of voting apathy.

Procedure

The study was in two phases. The first phase involved generation of items through review of the literature and then interview of individuals.

Interviewees were separately approached by the researcher and trained research assistants after informing the purpose of the exercise. Their consents to participating in the exercise were sought and obtained. They were given the assurance of confidentiality of the information provided. After this process, the items generated were given to experts in the field of Psychology, Sociology and Political Science who were told about the purpose of the study and encouraged to rate the appropriateness of each item. Their assistance to edit the items and make suggestion where necessary was equally sought. All the items that met the criteria of experts were then converted into questionnaire of five options and taken into the field. In the second phase, the content-validated items were taken to the field and administered to two thousand three hundred and thirty one (2331) participants in the six Registration areas (wards) that recorded the highest and lowest voter apathy across the three senatorial districts of Lagos State in the 2019 Presidential election. Purposive and judgmental sampling techniques were adopted in home, shops, religion centers, offices, workshop and schools. It was on the spot administration and collection of Questionnaires with the assurance of coverage of all the segment of the locality. Interestingly, all the people approached agreed to participate in the study but the researcher and the assistant using the criteria of age, that is, only individual of voting age were finally selected to be part of the study.

III. RESULTS

The pilot study produced and established the content validity in which the initial 16 items generated were reduced to 12 items after the experts rated the appropriateness of each item in measuring voter apathy using 80% support of the expert for each item (Okurame, 2002). In other words, items that 8 of the 10 experts adjudged as appropriate were included. In an attempt to establish the reliability of the scale, item analysis of the responses of participants to the 12-items scale was done using the Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS). Result of the item analysis showed a reliability coefficient alpha of .63 and standardized alpha of .63. However, six of the items loaded below 0.3 and were subsequently deleted (Pedhazur, 1982; Olapegba, 2008) which

reduced the 12-items to 6-items. In this way, the Alpha reliability coefficient and Standardized Alpha increased to .76 and .76 respectively. Other tests carried out revealed Guttman Split-half reliability coefficient of .74 and Correlation between forms of .60 while Equal length Spearman-Brown coefficient was .75 (Appendix 1). To determine the sampling adequacy, KMO and Bartlett's test of data suitability were carried out and the results reveals .820 and $\chi^2(78) = 3018.16$, $p < .001$ respectively. McDonald Omega's reliability test was also done to ascertain its readiness for factor analysis and this yielded coefficient of .88. The scale was subjected to factor analysis using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with Varimax & Kaiser Rotation Method recording communalities of variable's variability ranging between .346 and .573 and the eigenvalues of 2.793 with cumulative percentage variance of 46.552 (Appendix 2). The scoring dimension indicates that the higher the score, the higher the voter apathy.

IV. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study is to develop and validate a measure of voter apathy that is inherent with precise psychometric properties for political and other related affairs. This is more so as the rate of abstention during election(s) is becoming worrisome and has serious consequences for the governance of the country that the dividends of democracy are eluding the populace. Also, the availability of this Scale will enable concerned Agencies to find ways of reducing if not eliminating peoples' lackadaisical attitude toward voting. This is more so that the self-report approach at finding out why people are disinterested in voting are subjective and in most cases not a true reflection. The present scale has the advantage of identifying individuals expressing voting apathy and those with potentials to do it.

Statistical analysis in this study revealed that this scale is a valid measure of voter apathy in a general population. Validity was established through content based approach where experts were required to rate the appropriateness of each item on the scale (Nunnally, 1978; Cronbach, 1971). All the items included in the scale had at least 80% agreement of the expert which is in line with the assertion of Yu (2005) that content validity is established by content

experts and evidence is obtained by looking for agreement in judgments. According to the author, differentiating face validity from content validity requires the use of one expert to establish it while content validity involves a panel of experts. On this premise, the present scale becomes obvious as a good and valid measure of voter apathy.

On the reliability of the scale which is the consistency of measures, analysis shows that the 6 items yielded Alpha Coefficient of 0.76 and a Standardized Item Alpha of 0.76 and McDonald Omega test of .76, indicating desirable reliability. Correlation between forms was 0.60, Guttman split-half was 0.74 and Equal-length Spearman-Brown was .75. Alpha for parts 1 and 2 were .62 and .64 respectively. These psychometric properties clearly show that this scale is a very reliable measure of voter apathy which is in line with the position of American Foundational Research Association (1985) that a reliable measure should demonstrate form equivalence and internal constituency. Hence, this scale is not prone to random fluctuation; rather it will yield invariable responses across time and situations. Result of the factor analysis indicates that the 6-items were extracted as one factor (Appendix 2). This means, that all the items measured voter apathy as a composite construct as the scale cannot be broken down into sub scales. Similarly, the factor loading clearly shows that the items loaded between .588 to .757 and thereby expressing their strengths.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of this result, it is worthwhile to state that the scale is a valid measure of voter apathy as a psychological construct. Its importance lies in the ability to identify eligible individuals who are apathetic to voting prior to the conduct of elections in Nigeria and putting in place a robust mechanism to reduce if not eliminate such threat to democracy. Also, the scale can be used as a research instrument to ascertain the trends of political seclusion of the voting age (Appendix 3). This notwithstanding, further study can be conducted to assess its external validity through cross-cultural validation and standardization..

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