

POLITICAL EDUCATION AND VOTING PATTERN AMONGST FARMERS: CASE OF AWGU LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, ENUGU STATE

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Abstract

This study investigated the political education instance in Nigeria using Awgu local government area as study area. Four (4) research questions guided the study. Using a stratified random sampling approach, 6 political wards distinctively but homogeneously classified into two divisions of Awgu LGA – Awgu division and Mbanabo division – were selected for the study. Following the sample size and incidence respondent number were 600 and 400 respectively. Questionnaire instrument validated by experts in measurements and evaluation unit of the Enugu state college of Education (Technical) Enugu and divided into two sections was used for data collection. Section A contained enquiries boarding socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. Section B contained substantive issues. A positive correlation Pearson product moment correlation coefficient statistic result of 0.73 ($p < 0.01$) confirms the instrument to be reliable. Respondent response was organized in a likert four-point scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. The study concludes that political education influence voting pattern. It is recommended that crafting appropriate political education in Nigeria requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses local contexts, promotes inclusivity, fosters critical thinking, encourages collaboration, and prioritizes continuous evaluation and adaptation such to empower citizens to actively participate in democratic processes, hold leaders accountable, and contribute to a more prosperous and equitable society.

Keywords: Political education; voting pattern; effective governance; ruling class.

Introduction

One of the greatest features of democracy is that it allows people to elect leaders of their choice through a defined electoral process. As pointed out by Akinwumi and Nwosu (2008), democracy as a concept is a means to an end and hence leans heavily on other peripheral deliverables for it to bring about and make meaningful impact in everyday life.

In Nigeria and, since gaining independence in 1960, the country's democracy and voting journey has experienced periods of military rule interspersed with civilian governments. The transition to democracy in 1999 marked a significant turning point, with regular elections becoming a cornerstone of governance (Hoffmann & Wallace, 2023).

Voting in Nigeria is not merely meant to be a civic duty but a powerful tool for shaping the nation's future. It should allow citizens to choose their leaders and hold them accountable, fostering a sense of political participation and legitimacy (Chatham House, 2023). However, the Nigerian electoral process has faced challenges, including allegations of rigging, voter intimidation, and logistical issues that sometimes undermine the credibility of elections (Chatham House, 2023). This emphasizes the need for; political education intricately, linked to; democracy; voting, good governance and all; obvious in, political stability and citizen empowerment. Thus, the need for this study.

Again, the country's democracy continues to evolve, with efforts made to improve voting, electoral transparency and inclusivity. Voting – though still challenging – remains a vital mechanism for Nigerians to express their political preferences and influence policy decisions (Council on Foreign Relations, 2019). Thus, for instance, the introduction of biometric voter registration and electronic voting systems aimed at enhancing the integrity of the electoral process (Council on Foreign Relations, 2019). However, for the electorates to make impact in the democratic process; votes; need to count; become an inevitable means of accepting or rejecting leaders. Also, voters need to be informed on the entire political process (political education) towards achieving credible, free and fair electoral process (Kofi Annan Foundation, 2016). This explains why it is imperative and very crucial to assess the influence of political education on voting pattern.

Statement of purpose

Awgu Local Government Area is located in Enugu State, Nigeria. It is primarily rural and agriculture-centric. According to the National Population Commission (NPC) of Nigeria (2021), Awgu's population is predominantly Ibo, with a substantial rural populace engaged in subsistence farming (NPC, 2021). Farming is the cornerstone of Awgu's economy. Major crops include yams, cassava, maize, and vegetables, with small-scale livestock farming also present. These major farm crops highlight the economic reliance on agriculture in such regions (Adebayo & Adejumo, 2018). Local governance in Awgu LGA involves various traditional and political structures. The area's agricultural base makes it significant in local elections due to its large rural population (Ogunleye, 2020).

Political education processes in Awgu LGA of; learning about political systems, processes, and issues; impacts voting patterns. First, political education increases voter awareness of electoral processes and candidate policies (Campbell, 2020). Educated voters make decisions based on informed understanding rather than emotion (Pew Research Center, 2021). In addition, higher political knowledge is correlated with increased political engagement and participation (Delli-Carpini & Keeter, 1996).

Also, political education influences voting decisions. Educated voters are more informed about policies and candidate qualifications (Norris, 2017). Knowledgeable voters align their choices with their values and needs (Krosnick & Milburn, 1990). Better political education and

understanding reduces susceptibility to manipulation and misinformation (Miller & Krosnick, 2000). Educated voters are more likely to participate in elections (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995).

Specifically, in Awgu LGA, farmers are critical due to economic well-being of Awgu LGA. Agriculture is the primary economic activity in Awgu, with farmers contributing significantly to the local economy (Adebayo & Adejumo, 2018). Farming communities influence local social and political structures (Ogunleye, 2020). Hence, leveraging political education given the large number of farmers means; their voting patterns can significantly impact local elections (Enugu State Government, 2022).

Since, politically educated farmers are more likely to support candidates who advocate for agricultural development (Adebayo & Adejumo, 2018) and overall development; knowledge about policies (political education) helps farmers advocate for their needs (Norris, 2017). Again, understanding policy (political education) impacts enables strategic voting (Krosnick & Milburn, 1990).

Few studies on voting pattern focus explicitly on Awgu LGA farmers (Adebayo & Adejumo, 2018) particularly due to; insufficient data on how rural-specific factors affect voting patterns (Enugu State Government, 2022). Consequently, limited research on the role of political education in shaping farmers' voting behaviours (Norris, 2017) persist. Also, there is lack of longitudinal studies tracking voting behaviour changes over time (Pew Research Center, 2021). Thus, the need for this study

Purpose of the study

Unfortunately, in the immediate, Nigeria's experience and political space that though illustrates how democracy and voting are; deeply interconnected and, serve as foundational principles for political stability, social cohesion, and national development; yet, has being characterized by; political violence over the years (Human Rights Watch, 2007) and, widespread human right abuse in the long term (Abubaka, 2002). Hence, a situation which throws death and danger signals of death to the electorates each time there is election (Ede, 2002). While challenges persist, ongoing reforms and policy; to, uphold the integrity of elections and ensure solid democracy in Nigeria; needs to decipher the influence of deliverables such as political education as; vibrant and responsive or otherwise in advancing the electoral needs of Nigeria. Thus, the need for this study.

Moreover, Nigeria's democracy is strengthened by the diversity of its electorate, encompassing a wide range of ethnicities, religious persuasions and, socio-economic backgrounds. This diversity underscores the importance of inclusive governance and representation, where every citizen's voice can be heard through the ballot. Such diversity-scenario seems to have continued since pre-Nigeria's political history till the present. Political education that is a veritable tool for mass political participation in the voting processing (Akinwumi and Amusa, 2005) is; expected to inform the electorate about the pedigree and the intended political programs of political office hopefuls amongst others (Odeli (2003). Therefore, this study investigated political education and voting pattern in Awgu Local Government Area.

Research Questions

1. What is the perception among farmers in Agwu Local Government Area about the current political education?
2. To what extent does current political education increase willingness to vote in an election among farmers in Agwu Local Government Area?
3. To what extent does political violence influence voting pattern and political education among farmers in Agwu Local Government Area?

4. How can political education be improved to enhance informed voting decisions among farmers in Agwu Local Government Area?

Methods

The study adopted the quantitative research method and cross-sectional survey design. Ezeah (2004) affirmed that cross-sectional design takes a photographic situation report of issues, phenomenon or events. It is appropriate when one is undertaking a study on the knowledge, belief system, opinion and demographic variables of people.

Awgu local government is the area of the study. The local government has 11 wards was created following the 1976 local government reforms. It is one of the five local government areas in Enugu west senatorial zone. The inhabitants are Igbo speaking people with farming as their major occupation. The local government has boundary with Nkanu; to the North, Aninri Local Government to the South and Udi to the West (EduWeb, 2024). The choice of the area for the study is as a result of her; strategic landscape, political history; close-knit nature of communities in Awgu LGA that fosters collective decision-making processes (demographic diversity), local political engagement, educational infrastructure, specific governance challenges, unique socio-economic and developmental challenges with disparities in access to quality education and political literacy and community dynamics.

According to the national population census (2006); Awgu Local Government has a total population of 133,723. From this, the sample size for the study was drawn using the stratified random sampling technique. First, three (3) political wards each were randomly selected from the two divisions that make-up Awgu LGA. This makes a total of 6 political wards; Ihe, Agbogugu and Ituku distinctly but homogenously classified into Mbanabo division and; Mgbowo, Mmaku and Obeagu distinctly but homogenously classified into Awgu division. Next, 100 respondents were selected from each of the political wards making 600 respondents sample size. House listing follow at the ward level. Given the criteria for selection at the household-level was that someone who is 18 years and above will be resident and in place (incidence selection) at the time of data collection, 400 respondents emerged of the sample size of 600.

Questionnaire was the instrument used for the collection of data. The instrument was divided into two sections. Section A is the socio-demographic data of the respondents. Section B is the substantive issues. It was organized in a liker four-point scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. The instrument was validated by experts in measurements and evaluation unit of the Enugu State College of education (technical), Enugu.

The test re-test method was adopted in finding the reliability of the questionnaire. Following, the researcher administered 10 questionnaires to 10 respondents outside the area of the study. Two weeks later, the same instrument was re-administered to the same respondents. Given, a positive correlation Pearson product moment correlation coefficient statistic result of 0.73 ($p < 0.01$), the instrument was adopted as reliable. The instrument was distributed and collected through the help of four research assistants. The research assistants were trained for three weeks.

Data was analysed using the likert mean rating scale. The Likert mean rating assigned numerical values according to the strength and weakness of the opinion of the respondents in the following order; strongly agree (4 points), agree (3 points), disagree (2 points) and strongly disagree (1 point).

The decision rule for acceptance of the questionnaire item is a calculated mean of 2.5 and/or above whilst the decision rule for rejection was calculated mean of less than 2.5. The researcher equally employed the cumulative (grand mean) to determine the strength or weakness on the overall of the respondent's response per general questionnaire item.

Result

The analysis of data show that from the 400 questionnaires distributed, 389 were correctly filled and returned. This figure represents 97.3% of total incidence-sample size. The research questions were therefore analyzed given the 389 returned questionnaires

Table 1: Social-demographic characteristics of respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Sex		
Male	217	55.8
Female	172	44.2
Total	389	100
Age		
18-28	28	7.2
29-38	63	16.2
39-48	115	29.6
49-58	97	24.9
>58	86	22.1
Total	389	100
Marital status		
Single	138	35.5
Married	227	58.4
Separated	2	0.5
Divorced	9	2.3
Widowed	13	3.3
Education qualification		
No formal education	96	24.7
FSLC	103	26.5
NCE/OND	72	18.5
HND/1 st degree	97	24.9
Others	21	5.4

Source: Field survey, 2016/17

Table 1 show the personal data of the respondents. The distribution of the respondents by sex show that 217 (55.8%) were males while 172 (44.2%) were females. Age range distribution of the respondents shows that 28 (7.2%) fall within the age range 18 to 28 years, 63 (16.2%) within the 29 to 38 years age range, 115 respondents (29.6%) within the 39 to 48 age range, 97 respondents (24.9%) within the 59 years and above age range. In table 1, relative to educational qualification; 96 (24.7%) had no formal education, 103 (26.5%) had primary education, 72 (18.5%) had NCE/OND, 97 (24.9%) had HND/1st degree while 21 (5.45%) had other degrees.

Research question 1: What is the public perception of current political education?

S/N	Variable/Item	Responses						
		SA	A	D	SD	EFX/EFN	X	Decision
1.	Current political education on the overall is a political process influenced by the political class	188	139	34	28	1265/389	3.252	Accept
2.	Current political education enlightenment campaigns by government organs meant to	177	139	51	22	1249/389	3.211	Accept

enlighten the citizens are skewed to institutional bias

3.	On the overall, current political education carried out does not expound quantitatively the proposed programmes of public-office hopefuls?	162	143	55	29	1216/389	3.126	Accept
4.	On the overall, current political education carried out does not expound quantitatively how citizens can approach complaints after elections?	124	165	59	41	1150/389	2.956	Accept
5.	Without political education, electorates will find it difficult to comply with laid down voting pattern?	55	56	136	142	802/389	2.062	Reject

Table 2: Public perception of current political education
Source: Field survey, 2016/17

$$\text{Grand mean} = \sum \frac{x}{n} = \frac{3.252+3.211+3.126+2.956+2.062}{5} = \frac{14.607}{5} = 2.9214$$

Table 2 show the opinion of study respondents on how they perceive political education given a cluster of five questionnaire items 1-5. All the items recorded mean above the 2.5 mean bar except one (item 5). This implied that the respondents have negative perception of the current political education. The calculated grand mean of 2.9 equally buttress the cumulative opinion of the respondents.

Research question 2: To what extent does current political education increase willingness to vote in an election?

Table 3: Quality extent of current political education in increasing willingness to vote

S/N	Variable/Item	Responses						Decision
		SA	A	D	SD	EFX/EFN	X	
6.	Current political education is appropriate in causing quality leader optimal-choice of the electorates	41	54	158	136	778/389	2.0	Reject
7.	Current political education makes electorates realize the need to cast their votes	148	146	57	38	1182/389	3.039	Accept
8.	Current political education provide room to evaluate contestants who are likely to win an election	36	54	151	148	756/389	1.943	Reject
9.	Through current political education, citizens ask questions about political public-office hopefuls and their programmes. This spores them to vote	32	65	139	153	754/389	1.938	Reject

10.	With a multi-faceted political education approach that, addresses local contexts, promotes inclusivity, fosters critical thinking, encourages collaboration, and prioritizes continuous evaluation and adaptation electorates, are more likely to vote-in the right candidate	130	133	64	62	1109/389	2.851	Accept
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Source: Field survey, 2016/17

$$\text{Grand mean} = \sum \frac{x}{n} = \frac{2.0+3.039+1.943+1.938+2.851}{5} = \frac{11.771}{5} = 2.354$$

Table 3 show the opinion of respondents on extent political education increases willingness to vote. Information was elicited from the respondents in a cluster of five questionnaires items as contained in item 6-10. All the questionnaires item recorded mean below the 2.5 mean bar except two (item 7 and 10). This implies that political education does not increase the willingness of the electorates to vote. The calculated grand mean of 2.354 buttressed the negative general opinion of the respondents.

Researched question 3: To what extent does political violence influence voting pattern and political education?

Table 4: Extent political violence influence good political education

S/N	Variable/Item	Response				EFX/EFN	X	Decision
		SA	A	D	SD			
11.	When there is political violence, electorates still insist on voting candidates with proven track-record	41	38	161	149	749/389	1.925	Reject
12.	Political violence does not impede the expected political education of the electorate	22	73	143	151	744/389	1.913	Reject
13.	Political violence encourages active political interrogation by the electorate in determining which candidate to vote for	43	62	148	136	790/389	2.031	Reject
14.	In the absence of political education, political violence does not influence voting pattern of electorates	26	63	144	156	737/389	1.895	Reject

15.	Political violence does not manipulate electorate's orientation about politics and voting pattern for good	42	60	151	136	786/389	2.021	Reject
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Source: Field survey, 2016/17

$$\text{Grand mean} = \sum \frac{x}{n} = \frac{1.925+1.913+2.031+1.895+2.021}{5} = \frac{9.786}{5} = 1.957$$

Table 4 show the opinion of the respondents on the extent political violence influence good political education. Information was elicited from the respondents in a cluster of five questionnaire items as contained in 11-15. All the questionnaire items recorded less than the 2.5 mean bar. This implies that political violence influences good political education. The calculated grand mean of 1.957 buttress the cumulative opinion of the respondents.

Research question 4: What position should bear-on political education in Awgu local government area?

Table 5: Crafting appropriate political education

S/N	Variable/Item	Response							Decision
		SA	A	D	SD	EFX/EFN	X		
16.	Political education should insist public political hopefuls declare intentions early enough	151	138	72	28	1190/389	3.059	Accept	
17.	Political education should insist appropriate punishment be meted out to contestants who do not identify him/herself and programmes.	148	141	67	33	1182/389	3.039	Accept	
18.	Credible parties involved in political education should not be distorted	146	149	48	46	1173/389	3.015	Accept	
19.	Political education should bemoan political Sturge	148	136	66	39	1171/389	3.010	Accept	
20.	Political education should be a bureaucratic institution function	39	66	136	148	657/389	1.689	Reject	

Source: Field survey, 2016/17

Table 5 show the opinion of the respondents on position appropriate for political education in Awgu local government area. Information was elicited from the respondents in a cluster of five questionnaires items as contained in items 16-20. All the response-items were above the 2.5 mean bar except one (item 20). These include; early declaration of intentions by public political hopefuls; punishment for candidates who fail to identify him/herself and intended programmes; credible parties involved in political education should not be distorted and bemoaning of political Sturge via political education.

Discussion of Findings

Study respondents, as highlighted in table 1, posit negative public perception of study-period political education. Such perception has also negative influence on their voting pattern. The is in tandem with Udejaja (2006) who affirmed that democracy in developing countries is

characterized by judgement which represent the interest of the ruling class. This is often reflected in the actions and inactions across political periods of the ruling class and usually run contrary to their initial proposed public programs.

Again, as posited by respondents and highlighted in table 2, study-period political education does not increase willingness to vote. Following, in Nigeria by implication, people are often discouraged by the attitude of the political class whose action mostly, after the voting period, contravenes their earlier position. To this end, electorates assume these political public holders inconsistent and thus assume their vote, the voting process and the end-voting result as not competent to determine political leadership or the political candidate that will emerge. The is in consonance with Iwundu (2012) who affirmed that though election has become the most shared means of leadership tenure transition yet, it is subject to overall public attitude vis-à-vis being appropriately utilized in effectively causing positive leadership transition.

The study respondents equally alluded that political violence does not influence good political education. In Nigeria for instance and, by implication, the bureaucratic organization responsible for the political education of the people is the National Orientation Agency (NOA). Most of the time, this organization in question present an ideal electoral process and voting pattern. Regrettably, such extant fails to be the practice during election obvious in political violence during and after elections since the inception of democracy in 1999. Consequently, Akinwumi and Amusa (2005) conclude this challenge to be the engineering of the political class who fail in every political regime to engage non-distorted political education especially via public credible non-bureaucratic institutions/functions.

In reflection, and as alluded by respondents, political education should insist public political hopefuls declare intentions early enough, appropriate punishment should be meted out to contestants who do not identify him/herself and programmes, credible parties involved in political education should not be distorted, political education should bemoan political Sturge. Going forward and, as posited by respondents, political education should be skewed more to independent functions and probably implemented via non-bureaucratic institutions.

Conclusion and recommendation

The study concludes that political education influence voting pattern. In Nigeria, those in power have always prolonged themselves irrespective of their earlier pronouncement that election must be free, fair and credible. Such action negates the willingness of the electorates to participate in the elections. Citizens indeed have negative perception of political education inherent to, political violence.

In conclusion, appropriate political education in Nigeria is crucial for fostering informed citizenship, enhancing democratic participation, and promoting effective governance. This education must;

1. Understand local contexts: Political education initiatives must be tailored to address specific local issues, cultural norms, and socio-economic dynamics in different regions of Nigeria. This approach ensures relevance and resonance among diverse populations.
2. Be early and continuous: This includes teaching about democratic principles, electoral processes, rights, and responsibilities of citizens early enough towards building and continuing a strong foundation of civic knowledge and engagement
3. Be inclusive and accessible: Ensuring that political education reaches all segments of society, including rural populations, women, youth, and marginalized groups, is essential. Efforts should focus on making educational materials and programs accessible, engaging, and understandable to diverse audiences.

4. Promote critical thinking and literacy: Emphasizing critical thinking vis-à-vis individual programs of contestants per election and public office helps citizens discern credible contestants, and make informed political decisions. This is crucial as a political education characteristic and for the watch-out relative to electorates towards, navigating through manipulated information particularly, in an era of digital communication and misinformation.

5. Partner and collaborate: Collaborating with civil society organizations, educational institutions, media outlets, and governmental bodies such to amplify the impact of political education initiatives. Such partnerships can facilitate the development of comprehensive and effective educational programs sine qua none to emergence of quality leadership.

6. Be evaluated and adapt: Regular evaluation and adaptation of political education efforts based on feedback and outcomes are necessary to ensure effectiveness and relevance over time. Continuous improvement allows for addressing emerging challenges and maximizing impact.

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