

Impact of Devout Belief on Political Participation in Rivers State

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Abstract

This study was carried out on the impact of devout belief on political participation in Rivers State. The nature of Nigerian politics has always been premised on primordial factors that keep defining who gets what, how and when. The paper examines the ethnic colouration in the participating pattern of Nigerians during the election. The paper employs primordial theory of devout belief to explain the strength of devout belief in political participation. The paper exploits qualitative and quantitative components comprising questionnaire and content analysis of two dailies and review of literature as secondary data. The findings showed that 86.4% of the respondents with Hausa ethnic identity and 72% of the respondents with Igbo background agreed that some variables such as devout belief and religion were strong factors that impact their political participation in the election.

Introduction

Religion and religiosity are the concepts which are not easily defined up to the present. Not only defining the religion or religiosity but also measuring religiosity is also very problematic. Hökelekli points out that since there is no single form of religiosity, individuals believing in the same religion, even included in the same devout group, are different and for this reason, it is possible to mention a religiosity specific to every individual. Thus, this makes defining religiosity even much harder (Hökelekli, 2010: 81). In addition, Allport indicates that there are as many kinds of religion experiences as the number of people who tend to be devout in the world (Allport, 2004: 46). Similarly, Spilka et al. says that “there is obviously great overlap among the various proposals, but all agree on one thing: Even though there may be only one word of religion, there may be hundred possible ways of being devout” (Spilka et al., 1985: 7). In this respect, Fromm states another situation that is related to this issue. He argues that, it is extremely difficult to understand whether someone is devout or not. According to him, although some people claim that they are devout, they may not be devout internally, and people who say that they are not devout may act highly devoutly (Fromm, 1997: 239). It is understood from this argument that the problem lies not only at defining religiosity, but also at measuring religiosity, as well. Briefly it could be argued that for this research religiosity means to believe in a religion and to live the life in accordance with the requirements of that religion.

Political participation has started to gain importance from the second half of the 20th century with people’s beginning to take part in the political life, and has become a subject matter on which political scientists’ study intensively. In that era, democratic thinking gained importance and the idea of constructing political power on large masses instead of an intangible minority isolated from people is observed. In this respect, political participation is a concept that emerged as a result of the modernization process and as a component of modern societies. Just

as the definitions of religion and religiosity, this concept also has been defined and interpreted differently by different researchers.

Aristotle defines the human being as a “political animal”. Based on this quotation, it is possible to assume that human beings will take part in a political idea in some way or other. It is possible to express political participation as the attitudes and behaviors of the citizens towards the political system. Within this system, individuals perform some actions in order to affect directly or indirectly the decision-making of the political administrators. These actions may range from voting to participate in a candidate’s campaign, to collect signatures, or participating in boycotts or meetings. In addition, individuals may follow political agenda via mass media or perform a political attitude and action by discussing political issues within their family or friends. So, it is also possible to say that not every individual performs the same level of participation. While some follow up the political agenda just as spectators, some others may prefer to take part in politics actively.

Political participation is defined differently by many researches. Some consider just voting as adequate for political participation, some others, nevertheless, state that campaign activity, protest behavior and volunteering should also be considered for political participation. First of all, Van Deth states as summarizing the situation that political participation is a wide-ranging concept and “has become a study of everything” (Van Deth, 2001: 2). Different forms of political participation were first started to be discussed by political scientists in 1960s-1970s (Milbrath, 1965; Verba and Nie, 1972; Barnes and Kaase, 1979). While Milbrath expressed that political participation was unidimensional, Barnes et al. (1979) mentioned two dimensions, namely conventional and un-conventional. Political participation was considered as unidimensional in 1950s and 1960s, but later it was studied as a multidimensional concept. In addition to a direct relation to political engagement, affects political awareness as well. In this regard, Greenberg (2000) argues that political relations affected by devoutness not only increase people’s motivation to participate, but it also enables them to feel that their impact on political processes is better and more effective. Results from the research by Duries et al. demonstrate that in the socio-cultural and political environment studied, despite the high impact of value inclinations, devoutness is the more important factor affecting political attitude. Based on their research findings, Hoffman and Dowd (2008) argue that individuals with stronger devout inclinations have higher political awareness, and religion and faith have considerable effect on their political engagements. Their findings show that both Islam and Christianity invite people to participate, but participation has been higher among Moslems than Christians. Epley (2005) refers to devout motivation as a factor influencing participative spirit in individuals. On this background the researcher wants to investigate impact of devout belief on political participation in Rivers State.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The methodology adopted for this research is quantitative which emphasizes on the use of numeric data and statistics to draw out its findings. The quantitative methodology is also used in situation where a general knowledge is needed about a certain problem, the quantitative methodology tries to discover the magnitude, frequency and extent of the independent variable on the dependent variable.

Method of Sampling

The simple random sampling will be used for sampling this is because it gives everyone the opportunity to be selected by eliminating bias.

Instrumentation

The questionnaire was designed to address the objectives of this study with eighteen questions which were divided into two (2) sections, namely the section A and section B. The section A comprises of the socio-demographical characteristics of the respondents while section B contains questions on issues in devout belief and participating pattern.

Method of Data Collection

Data will be collected for this research from both primary and secondary sources

The primary source of data will be collected from the distribution of questionnaires to a population of voters, INEC officials and politicians in Rivers State, . 150 questionnaires were distributed to get vast opinions and views

The secondary source of data was collected from the review of books, journals and academic materials written on the subject matter.

Method of data analysis

Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was employed in analyzing the data collected.

Table 1. Distributions of Respondents by Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Age	Frequency	Percent
18-28	41	41.0
29-39	28	28.0
40-50	22	22.0
51 and above	9	9.0
Total	100	100
Sex	Frequency	Percent
Male	59	59.0
Female	41	41.0
Total	100	100
Ethnic group	Frequency	Percent
Yoruba	32	32.0
Hausa	23	22.0
Igbo	24	25.0
Others	21	21.0
Total	100	100
Religion	Frequency	Percent
Christianity	51	51.0
Islamic	42	42.0
Traditional African R	5	5.0
Others	2	2.0
Occupation	Frequency	Percent
Trader	11	11.0
Civil Servant	52	52.0
Student	19	19.0
Self Employed	12	12.0
Unemployed	6	6.0
Total	100	100

AGE

The data reveals that 41% of the respondents were within the age bracket of 18-28 years, constituting the highest population in the sample; followed by those aged 29-39 with a percentage distribution of about 28%. Those aged between 40-50 and 51 and above had a percentage distribution of about 22% and 9% respectively.

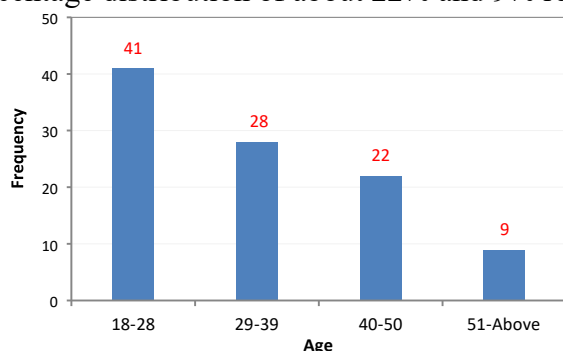


Fig 3 Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Age

Sex

The sex composition of the sample population was dominated by males with about 59% while females made up the remaining 41% of the sample population.

Ethnic Group

The illustration from the table showed that respondents with Yoruba origin had the highest percentage distribution of 32% of the sample population. A major reason for this is because the study area is located within Rivers State, Rivers State State. Aside those that have Yoruba ethnic identity, respondents from the Igbo ethnic identity had the second largest percentage distribution with 25% of the sample population. This may not be unconnected from other ethnic identities of Middle belt and others made up 21% of the respondents. This indicates minority representation in Nigeria.

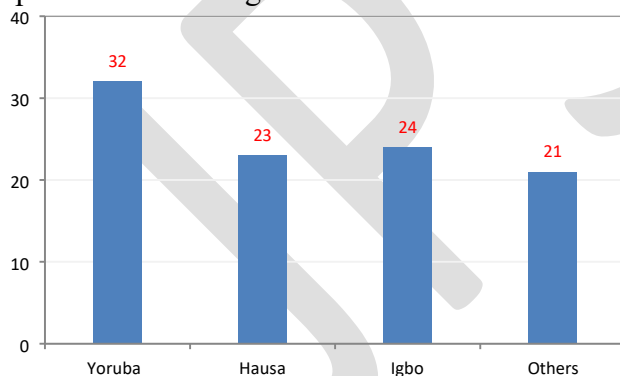


Fig 4. Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Ethnic Group

Religion

With respect to religion respondents, the results show that about 51% of the respondents had Christian background, 42% were Islamic faithful while those practicing African Traditional Religion and others formed 5% and 2% respectively. We saw the massive turnout by Christians and Muslims in Rivers State during the 2015 presidential election because of the devout background of the two leading presidential candidates.

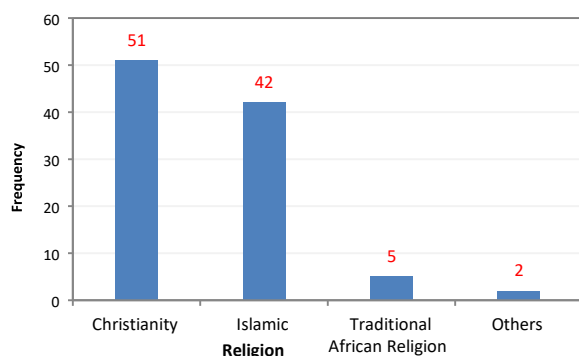


Fig 5 Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Religion

Occupation

The occupational percentage distribution peaked at the third civil servants with about 52% of the respondents. Civil servants had the highest percentage which is in line with the character of city with dominant institutional centers. Respondents who were students had a fair share in the occupation percentage distribution. Students made up about 19% of the sample population. The presence of several institutions which include: University of Rivers State, The Polytechnic, Rivers State, University Teaching Hospital, Rivers State among others and several private higher institutions. Those that are self employed accounted for the 12% of the sample population while 11% of the respondents were traders as at the time of the survey. The unemployed made up 6% of the sample population.

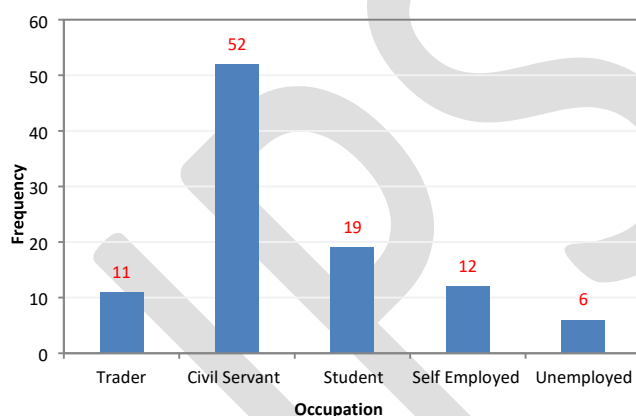


Fig 6 Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Occupation]

The Table (2) shows the return rate of respondents' state of origin. The data shows that a majority of the respondents of 8% hail from Rivers State, followed by 7% who are from Abia State while respondents from Benue State, Osun and Kaduna made up of 6% of the respondents each. It is not surprising though that Rivers State had the highest number of respondents. The study was carried out in Rivers State and as such this might explain the majority of respondents voted in Rivers State. Other respondents from other states represented 67% of the entire sample population.

Table2. Return Rates of Respondents by State of Origin State of origin Frequency

Percent		
Abia	7	7.0
Adamawa	3	3.0
Akwa Ibom	2	2.0
Anambra	4	4.0

Bauchi	3	3.0
Bayelsa	3	3.0
Benue	6	6.0
Borno	1	1.0
Cross River	4	4.0
Delta	3	3.0
Ebonyi	4	4.0
Edo	1	1.0
Ekiti	5	5.0
Enugu	3	3.0
Imo	4	4.0
Jigawa	1	1.0
Kaduna	6	6.0
Kano	3	3.0
Kogi	3	3.0
Kwara	2	2.0
Lagos	2	2.0
Ogun	5	5.0
Ondo	4	4.0
Osun	6	6.0
Rivers State	8	8.0
Rivers	1	1.0
Sokoto	4	4.0
Taraba	2	2.0
Total	100	100.0

4.2 Major findings

This section describes the various responses given by the respondents and their implications to the questions that were raised in the course of the research.

Devout Beliefs And Its Strength On Electorates Political Participation

Table (3) illustrates the role of devout belief in political participation during the 2015 presidential election in Rivers State, Rivers State State. All the ethnic groups in Nigeria adequately participated during the presidential election in Rivers State, Rivers State State. 31.3% of the respondents with Yoruba ethnic identity concurred to the fact that devout belief impactd voter's behaviour in the election while 68.7% of them refuted the claim.

Table 3. Do you consider ethnic identity as a primary force during participating in the 2015 presidential election?

Ethnic group	Yes	No
Yoruba	31.3%	68.7%
Hausa	82.6%	17.4%
Igbo	75.0%	25.0%
Others	81.0%	19.0%

Among the Hausas, 82.6% of the respondents agreed that ethnic identity is a primary force during the participating with 17.4% negating the assumption. A greater number of respondents with Igbo identity believed that devout belief was a force in the political participation of the electorates during the election. 75% laid claim to that while 25% maintained that devout belief

did not impact political participation in the presidential election. 81% of other people with different ethnic identities believed that devout belief was a force that impacted how the electorates voted in the presidential election. 19% of them maintained that devout belief did not impact the participating pattern.

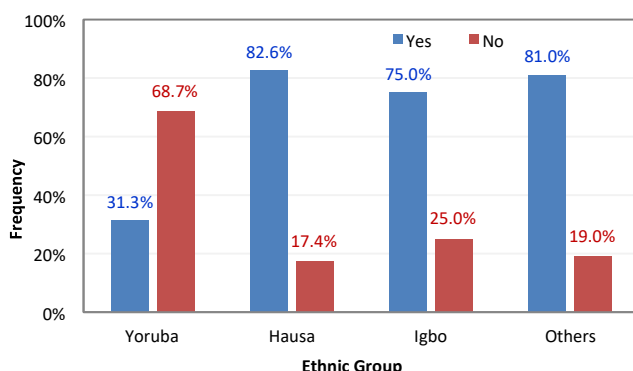


Fig 7 The Strength of devout belief on Electorates Political participation (Do you consider ethnic identity as a primary force during participating in the 2015 presidential election?)

The result of the findings from the table corresponds with (Geertz, 1963) argument. He argued that there are high correlations between ethnic identity and political participation. His work formalizes ethnic identity as a determinant of political behaviour (Geertz, 1963). Gill and Gainous (2002) further expanded on the strong affinity between devout belief and political participation when he said that people will tend to vote for candidates and positions of parties they have come to identify with. Except for the Yorubas who did not field their own candidate became rational in choice making and choose the party candidate, which comes closest to their own interests, values and priorities, other ethnic identities confirmed that participating tilted towards the candidates that shared the same religion, language or ancestry irrespective of the voter's place of residence and polling booth.

Primordial Ties and The Choice of a Candidate

The Table 4 illustrates the relationship between primordial ties and the choice of a candidate by the electorates.

Table 4. Could devout belief have impacted the results of the 2015 presidential election?

	Yes	No
Ethnic group	63.3%	36.7%
Yoruba		
Hausa	77.3%	22.7%
Igbo	84.0%	16.0%
Others	60.9%	39.1%

All the ethnic identities sampled concurred that there is a relationship between primordial ties and the choice of a candidate. More than two thirds of the Igbo ethnic identities making up the 84% of the respondents with Igbo ethnic identity believed that there exist a relationship between primordial ties and the choice of a candidate while 16% was of the opinion that there is none. 77.3% of the Hausa ethnic identity agreed that there is a relationship between primordial ties and the choice of a candidate with 22.7% of the same sample population disagreeing to that assumption. Furthermore, 60.9% of other ethnic identities also agreed of the relationship while 39.1% said none existed. The Yoruba identity that believed in the relationship was 63.3% and those that did not believe in it were 36.7%.

The result from the table correlates with (Jones, 1997) argument on devout belief saying that devout belief is regarded as constituting the shared beliefs and practices that provide a group with the boundary maintenance and organizational dimensions necessary to maintain and compete for, socioeconomic resources. Voters had collective or individual interest protected by casting votes to candidates that could protect those interests. The two major blocs during the 2015 presidential elections, the 'political South and 'political North' carried out campaigns that motivated voters along ethnic lines. There was massive mobilization for APC candidate in the dense Hausa Muslim Northern regions and for PDP candidate in the dense Christian South-South and South-East regions.

Conclusion

This study was carried out on devout belief and participating behavior in Nigeria. It is limited in term of the size of the sample which should have included samples from other geopolitical zones of the country. Also, the adoption of content analysis of two dailies in addition to the questionnaire administration technique would have revealed the political participation of Nigerians during the election. It is expected that further research will be conducted to identify other variables that are predictors of participating pattern in Nigeria.

The study reveals that some significant relationships existed between devout belief and political participation of the electorates. The results show that some variables such as common ancestry and language of the voters, ethnic and devout affiliation and other primordial bonds did significantly impact political participation of the electorates during the 2015 presidential election. This was evident among the Igbo and the Hausa ethnic identities because the major contestants emerged from the two ethnic identities. Most Igbo voted for the incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan because he is from south-south region. Most Northern settlements in Rivers State voted massively for Muhammadu Buhari because they shared a common ancestry irrespective of the location, they cast their votes.

The election witnessed an intense politicization of the Muslim-Christian divide and the north-south dichotomy in the country. The name 'political south' and 'political north' was induced by voters particularly in the south-east, south and north-east, north-west regions. The result released by INEC in the south-south and south-east saw PDP securing 87.55% and 89.66% respectively of the entire votes for Jonathan while north-west and north-east saw APC securing 81.34% and 75.28% respectively of the votes for Muhammadu Buhari. Primordial ties with the presidential candidates during the 2015 presidential election played a vital role in the emergence of such candidates emerging winners in such places of the ties.

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