

**A Study of Voters' Turnout in the University of Ilorin Students Union
Election of 2015**

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Abstract

Every human interaction has an iota of politicking prowess. Political participation transcends the electioneering period. It includes the pre election, election and post election period. It is the hallmark of a vibrant political entity. The school as an agent of socialization is a replica of the nationwide politics; therefore, it has its political atmosphere. Students' elections are fundamental to the school authority as it produces student representatives that will stand as intermediary between the students and the school authority. The focus of this paper is to assess the factor affecting the level of political participation of students in the election of their representatives. The rational choice theory is used to explain why voters votes or not. The quantitative methodology is as well adopted to assess the level of political participation of students in the union election. Conclusion is premised on the ground of building the nation's democracy from the grassroots of tertiary institutions while a rapid response to the culture of political apathy is recommendation.

Keywords: Elections, Student, Politics, Democracy, Political Culture and Education

Introduction

Election has been a viable means of ensuring the orderly process of leadership succession and change. It is also an instrument of political authority and legitimization which stands as a symbol of popular sovereignty and the expression of the social pact between the state and the people. Election is one of the cardinal features of democratic politics (Omotola 2014). It is a process and a fundamental aspect of democratic values in a representative democracy. It is therefore, very important to note that democratic system and government can only be meaningful and entrenched through competitive elections and transparent electoral process. Without elections however, there cannot be democracy and legitimacy in governance.

Political apathy behaviour in electioneering and voting process erodes the activity and legitimacy of elected government and democratic institutions in many polities (Berouk 2008; Beaulieu 2008; Saka 2009; Omotola 2014). This is why voter turnout is commonly considered as an indicator of the vitality of democracy and is a major concern for political actors in democratic regimes. The people via elections give authority to their representatives and can make their government accountable by their votes. Therefore, the lower the turnout, the less representative and legitimate the government is. Election as a form of political participation is an important tool in the realization of democracy (Aremu 2004; Maphosa 2012; Ahmad 2015). It is regarded as a mechanism through which citizens get an opportunity to decide and influence their destiny through a political process.

The students' elections in tertiary institutions are not different from those seen in the wider general politicking states. It is a miniature and replica of the global and national politics. Therefore, for the students to have credible representatives there must be election in a form, be it credible, inclusive, non inclusive or selection in another form. It is important to note that the student unions formed by selections are majorly in autocratic leadership regime of tertiary institutions while those with elective representatives are in a democratic leadership regime of tertiary institutions. In a democratic tertiary institution, the voters' turnout is a function of many factors which is conditioned by the students and or the school management.

However, with the establishment of the University of Ilorin by a decree of the Federal Military Government in August 1975, the Student Union was formed in 1976. Since inception, many elections had been conducted till date and thirty five (35) leaders (presidents and presiding officers) were enthroned to lead the student polity (University of Ilorin 2001; 2013). The level of voters' turnout and political participation is affected by many factors (intrinsic and extrinsic) as there is reduced participation in the voting exercise of the students. This paper is poised to assess the factor affecting the level of political participation in terms of voters' turnout of students in the election of their representatives in the 2015 student Union elections.

This Paper takes turn to assess voter turnout as a function of political participation in a democratic polity and the student union elections in the University of Ilorin is the focus. The factors affecting voter turnout in an election is considered in relations to the rational choice theory. The

methodology employed was quantitative approach and the discussion of findings is analysed with descriptive statistics.

Voters Turnout in Elections

Voters' turnout amounts to the percentage of voters who cast votes in an election out of the total registered voters. Voter turnout in terms of the relationship between the percentages of voting age population refers to the percentage of voters who are eligible to vote, whether they registered and voted or not. Schmitt (1998), International Peace Institute (2012) and Aremu and Aluko (2015) noted that it is the total number of voters who participated in voting. A high turnout is generally seen as evidence of legitimacy of a democratic government. This is a major reason why dictator government is regarded as illegitimate and the one party governments which makes up election and fabricate high turnout of voters' so as to justify their legitimacy.

Voter turnout is also an indicator of representativeness of the elected persons; a low turnout could mean that the elected person does not have the mandate of the people. In the developed countries, non-voters tend to be concentrated in particular demographic and socio-economic groups, most especially the young and the poor. While in a country like India the reverse is the case, the poor who comprises the majority of the electorates records more voters' turnout, than the rich and the middle class (Verma 2005; Nag 2013). In general, voter turnout, especially in local elections could be an indication of approval or disapproval of government performance as well as an indication of the willingness of the citizens to participate in the decision making and governance of their locality.

The Voting Age Population (VAP) is the total number of people in a given area older than the area's voting age. To arrive at a voter turnout figure, the number of votes cast is divided by the voter population, which will obviously yield a percentage (Schmitt 1998). The VAP numbers are not strictly limited to only those over acceptable voters' age in a polity [usually eighteen years (18)]. It also takes account of non-citizens, those who have been convicted of felonies and those currently incarcerated. To deal with the apparent problems inherent in the VAP method of calculating voter turnout, other empirical methods have been developed so as to ensure accuracy.

VAP= Total Population (TP) Minus Population in Voting Age (PVA)

$$\boxed{VAP = TP - PVA} \dots\dots\dots \text{Equation 1}$$

The Voter Eligibility Population (VEP) method is a cardinal point in measuring voters' turnout. VEP is obtained by subtracting an estimate of the people ineligible to vote, such as non-citizens and felons from the VAP calculations. The number of eligible voters overseas is added. The figure that is attained is the VEP. This figure is finally divided by the number of people who actually voted in order to arrive at a voter turnout percentage.

VEP = VAP minus Non Voting Population (nVP) divided by Actual Voters (AV)

$$VEP = \frac{VAP - nVP}{AV} \dots\dots\dots \text{Equation 2}$$

The Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2009), has chosen to use not only the reported registration rate to calculate turnout percentages, but also the voting age population (VAP) which includes all citizens above the legal voting age.

Theoretical Framework

The Rational Choice Theory

The origin of the rational choice theory can be traced to the discipline of economics where any consumer attempts to link his/her unlimited wants with the limited resources at his/her disposal in a way that will give a better value. This theoretical background used for an explanation of voter turnout has been submitted by Anthony Downs (1957) in his work "An Economic Theory of Democracy". He observed that citizen's vote for whatever party they believe will provide them with the highest utility income from government action.

Stated simply, citizens vote when the benefits of voting exceed their perceived costs. Hence the basic formula for determining whether someone will vote is $PB + D > C$ where P is the probability that an individual's vote will affect the outcome of an election and B the perceived benefits that will be received if that person's favoured political party or candidate were elected. D originally stood for democracy or civic duty, but today represents any social or personal qualification an individual gets from voting. C is the

time, effort, and financial cost involved in voting. Since P is virtually zero in most elections, PB is also near zero and D is thus, the most important element in motivating people to vote.

Critics of this theory believe that voting is not all about rational choice of trade off politics but also irrational choices that will bring destabilization to the opponents' regularised options. They also submitted that rational choice might be good for the educated only but the polity is a compendium of both educated and the uneducated. So, it is a parochial view of political decision making (Brandt 2015)

However, the rational choice is still very appropriate as there is a basic level of knowledge that an uneducated person requires to survive (Johnson, 2015). This same basic level of knowledge is needed to make choices that will make him survive in the election of public representatives. Moreover, this theory explains the reasons why people do not just make sudden decisions that may be harmful in the nearest future. Such choices include the decision to vote for a candidate on a soap box or to vie for an elective position in an organization or a wider polity.

Student Union Election in the University of Ilorin

Student Union in the University of Ilorin is as old as the institution. The Compendium of the Student Union Law (2014b) is a document that establishes the Independent Student Electoral Commission (I.S.E.C) and to regulate the conduct of faculties and University Student Union elections. The eligibility for nomination and appointment as a member of ISEC includes the following: Such student must be of a credible character, have never been found guilty of any disciplinary act by the school, have never been found guilty of any disciplinary act by any court of competent jurisdiction within and outside the school, must have a minimum Cumulative Grade Point Average (C.G.P.A) of 3.0 or P.A of 50 points and Must be politically neutral.

Other major part of the student elections are the Congress, the Central Executive, the Senate House and the Judiciary. The Congress: The general assembly of all the students is referred to as Congress of which 7 per cent of total membership of the union constitutes a quorum at the Ordinary Congress. The Congress includes the ordinary and the extra-ordinary congress and voting in an ordinary congress is by voice vote or secret ballot if so required by a simple majority of members present. Whereas in an extra-ordinary congress, the president summon extra-ordinary congress when he

considers it necessary or on a written request sign by not less than 5 per cent of ordinary member of the union (University of Ilorin 2014b; 2015).

The central executive council (C.E.C) includes the President (permanent site), Vice President (College of Health Sciences), General-Secretary, Assistant General-Secretary, Financial Secretary, Welfare Secretary 1 (permanent site), Welfare Secretary 2 (College of Health Sciences), Public Relations Officer, Sport Secretary, Social Secretary and Attorney General. The Senate House is composed of the elected representatives of halls of residence (one each), Faculties (three from each Faculty) and the student union central executive council; moreover it shall have three (3) principal officers namely the Senate President, the Deputy Senate President and the Clerk.

The judicial power of the union shall be vested in the judicial arm of the union commonly known as the Judicial Council. It is important to note that the judicial council shall consist of four (4) members from the Faculty of Law and five(5) other members from proven experience and integrity, all appointed by the Senate House, upon the nomination by any Senate House members from the Faculties of the nominees (University of Ilorin 2014a 2014).

Factors Affecting Voter Turnout in an Election

Recognizing the importance of citizens' participation to democracy, Dahl (1971), Kühne (2010) and Crossroads (2011) commented that turnout plays an important role in democratic consolidation. Moreover, political scientists have long been concerned with discovering turnout's determinants. Voter turnout is determined by a function of variables that operate on three levels, namely the national, the district, and the individual, among others factors.

1. **National Level Determinants:** The distinguishing feature of national level determinants is the consistency of its effect across all individuals and regions within a country. National level determinants do not vary within a country. For instance, if a country has compulsory voting, the requirement to vote and penalty for non-compliance applies equally to all regions and to all citizens. Similarly, the electoral rule is applied uniformly to all ballots cast in an election.

2. **District Level Determinants:** This operates at the sub national level, but larger than the individual citizen units. This district covers the geopolitical zones and neo-divisions of the whole polity like regional or provincial in some instances. That distinguishing feature of determinants at this level is their constant effect on citizens living in some contiguous sub national area, but variance in effect from area to area (Blais 2000). The two most common district level determinants are the competitiveness of elections, and whether an area is urban or rural, both of which work by way of mobilization.
3. **Individual Level Determinants:** This level of determination affect voters' turnout at the individual level. These determinants vary across the smallest unit of individual citizen. Although not always explicitly recognized, individual level determinants is conditioned by three sub-factors; demographic, attitudinal and political affiliation.
4. **Mobility:** Residential mobility simply depresses voters' turnout and causes retrogression in the polity. If there is higher number of death among the VAP or VEP then the polity is depleted of educated voters. Therefore, the polity will constantly witness voters' apathy.
5. **Residence:** There is a tendency that people who live in rural areas are more likely to vote than the people who live in urban areas. The tide may change depending on the region. This also bore down to the individual determinant level of attitude and political affiliations.
6. **Education:** Citizens with more formal education are more likely to vote. The impact of education on a person's turnout depends partly on the educational attainment and political activity of other people in that individual's environment. The more a person's education attainment exceeds that of others in his or her age group, the more likely he or she is to vote (Tenn 2005). Greater opportunity costs for spending time on politics incur. Wealthy people perceive that they have a greater interest and voting. elections or have greater senses of political efficacy. They also gain greater psychological or social rewards from voting.
7. **Income:** People with higher incomes incur greater opportunity costs for spending time on politics and voting. Wealthy people perceive that they have a greater interest and voting. elections or have greater senses of political efficacy. They also gain greater psychological or social rewards from voting.
8. **Age:** People appear to become increasingly likely to vote as they progress from early adulthood through middle adulthood; after about age of 75, people become less likely to vote (Strate 1989). As people

grow older, they gain skills advantageous to voting, or they may become more motivated because they perceive their age group members to have more at stake economically in election outcomes. Growing older may lower the information costs of voting, because people may become more knowledgeable about the parties and the political process by watching them in action for many years, especially early in adulthood.

9. **Group Solidarity:** When members of a particular social group for example: racial, economic, gender, or age identify strongly with a group, those people develop a group consciousness that appears to increase voting turnout. People who perceived that their lives are intrinsically tied to other members of their social group appear to change their political behaviour. People with high solidarity could have higher motivation to vote because they are concerned with issues affecting their group or their strong connection to members of that group could give them skills that enable them to vote.
10. **Religious Affiliation:** Religious group activity in particular is one of the strongest predictors of voter turnout, even more than socio-economic status. Religious groups might stimulate political activity directly or as by-products of their tendency to increase civic skills, political interest, feelings of efficacy, access to political information, and a sense of civic duty.
11. **Compulsory Voting:** All democratic governments consider participating in national election a right of citizenship and a citizen's civic responsibility (Olson 1991). Some consider that participation in elections is also a citizen's duty. In some countries, where voting is considered a duty, voting at elections has been made compulsory and has been regulated in the national constitutions or electoral laws. Some countries impose sanctions on non-voters. Countries with compulsory voting such as Australia, have higher levels of turnout.
12. **Other factors:** This include gender, the level of trust, negative campaign, voters registration barrier, habit, candidate popularity or political strength, genetic among others, all have impacts on the voters' turnout in any political system.

Methodology

The Research Design adopted in this paper is survey and descriptive research design. Random sampling procedure was adopted to administer one hundred questionnaires among the students. This is to examine the factors affecting the level of voters' turnout in the 2015 Student Union election. The factors tested include the level of campaign by the contestant, the popularity of contestant, same gender factor, the E-voting procedure, level of ISEC fairness and external factor influence (lecturers and school authority's interest). The sample population of this study comprises of the University of Ilorin students. The data obtained were analyzed by simple percentage computations and descriptive statistical method of analysis using bar chart.

Discussion of Findings

There are many factors tested in this section so as to deduce the perception of the students on the reason for the voters' turnout. This include the level of campaign by the contestant, the popularity of contestant, same gender factor, the E-voting procedure, level of ISEC fairness and external factor influence.

Factors Affecting Voters turnout in University of Ilorin Student Union Elections

1. Level of Campaign by the Contestants.

This entails the campaign strategies used by the candidate, the time framework for the campaign and the mobilization pattern.

	Response	Percentage Response
Strongly Agreed	24	34%
Agreed	28	40%
Undecided	6	9%
Disagreed	7	10%
Strongly Disagreed	5	7%

Table 1

Source: Researchers Fieldwork (2015)

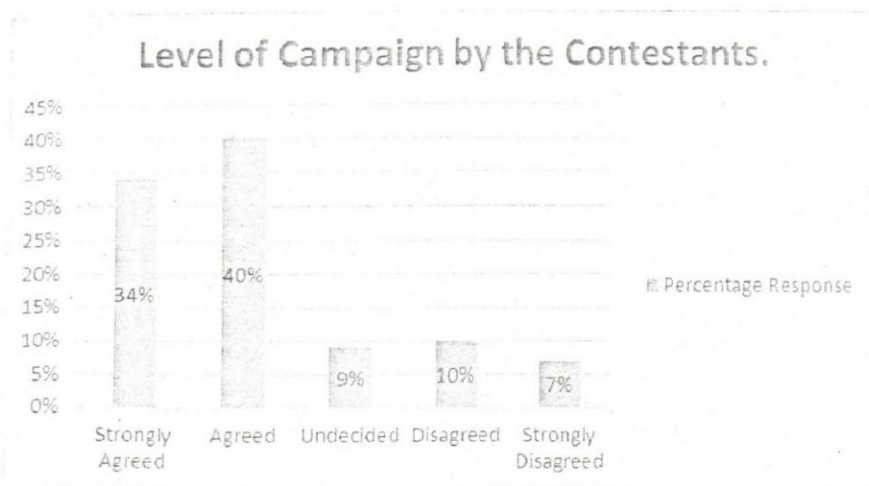


Figure I

From table I above, the factors of the level of campaign by the contestants is considered. It is observed that 34 per cent of the students strongly agreed that the level of campaign by the contestants determines voters' turnout. A large portion of the students which cumulates to 40 per cent simply agreed to this assertion. A proportion which amounts to 10 per cent of the students' population disagreed to the assertion that level of campaign by the contestants affected the turnout, while a fraction which amounts to 7 per cent of the student population strongly disagreed to the assertion. It is observed that 9 per cent of the students were undecided. A cumulative total of 74 per cent of the students simply agree to this assertion while a total of 70 per cent of the students simply disagreed to this assertion. This means that the level of campaign among student is a potent factor that determined political participation in term of voters' turnout among the students.

2. Popularity of the Contestants

This entails how famous the contestants were to the electorates and the level of familiarity the electorates have on their respective manifestoes.

	Response	Percentage Response
Strongly Agreed	23	33.8%
Agreed	24	35.29%
Undecided	9	13.2%
Disagreed	8	11.8%
Strongly Disagreed	4	5.9%

Table II

Source: Researchers Fieldwork (2015)

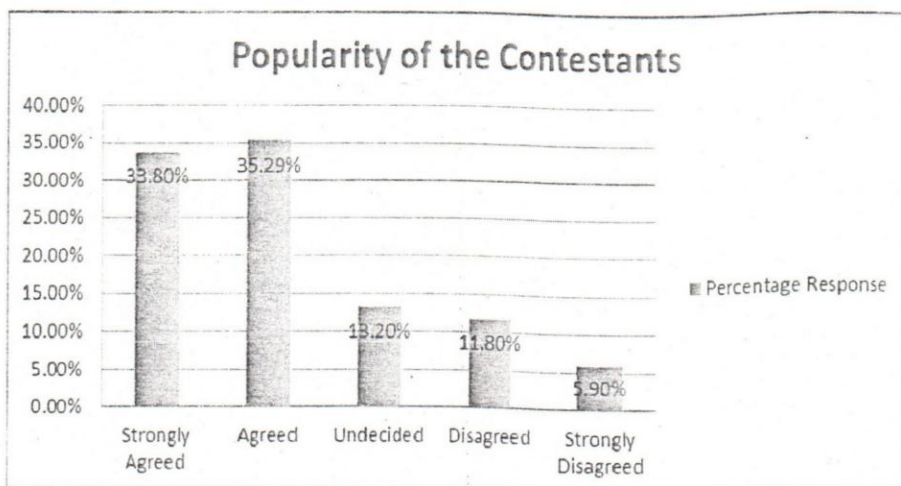


Figure II

From the table II above, the second factor considered affecting voters' turnout among students is the popularity of the contestants. It is observed that about 33.8 per cent of the university students strongly agreed that the popularity of the contestants determined voters' turnout. A large portion of the students which cumulates to 35.29 per cent simply agreed to this assertion. It is observed that 13.2 per cent of the students were undecided.

A proportion which amounts to 11.8 per cent of the students population, disagreed to this assertion whereas a fraction of 5.9 per cent of University students strongly disagreed to this assertion. A cumulative total of about 69 per cent of the students simply agreed to this assertion while a total of 17.7 per cent of students of the University disagreed to this assertion. This means that the popularity of the contestants among student was a strong factor that determined political participation in term of voters' turnout among the students.

3. Same gender Status Factor

This factor is a test of acceptability of gender of the contestants whether the electorates turned out better when candidates contesting are of different gender or they are of the same gender.

	Response	Percentage Response
Strongly Agreed	12	17%
Agreed	15	21%
Undecided	6	9%
Disagreed	26	37%
Strongly Disagreed	11	16%

Table III

Source: Researchers Fieldwork (2015)

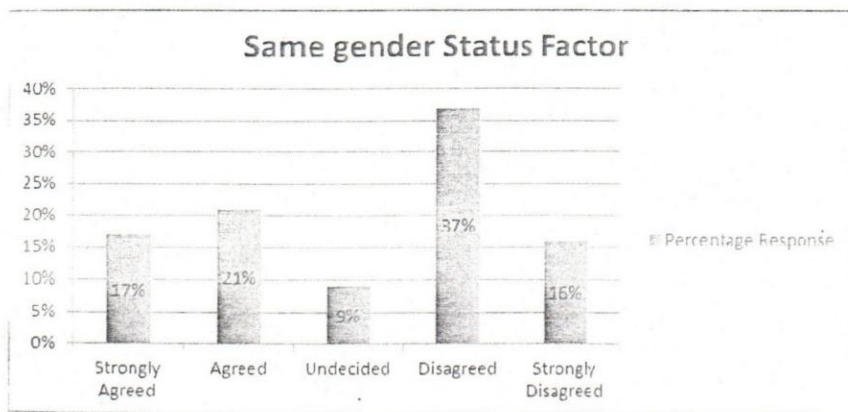


Figure III

From the table III above, the third factor affecting voter's turnout in the University Student Union election was same gender status factor. It is observed that 17 per cent of the University students strongly agreed that same gender status factor determined voter's turnout. A large portion of the student which cumulates to 21per cent simply agreed to this assertion. It is observed that 9 per cent of the students were undecided. Proportions which amounts to 37 per cent of the student's population disagreed to this assertion, whereas a total of 16 per cent of the University students strongly disagree to this assertion.

A cumulative total of 38 per cent of the students, simply agreed with this assertion while a total of 53 per cent of the University of Ilorin students disagreed to this assertion. This implies that same gender status factor of having all male contesting for a position or all female contesting for a position among students was not a potent factor that determines political participation in term of voters' turnout among the students.

4. E-voting is influenced by the access to internet and procedures

This particular test examines the effect of the electronic voting on the voters' turnout.

	Response	Percentage Response
Strongly Agreed	28	41.8%
Agreed	25	37.3%
Undecided	3	4.5%
Disagreed	6	8.9%
Strongly Disagreed	5	7.5%

Table IV

Source: Researchers Fieldwork (2015)

E voting is Influenced by the Access to Internet and Procedures

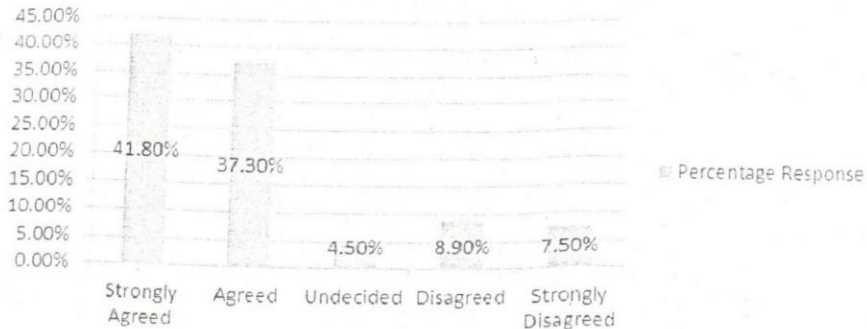


Figure IV

From the table IV above, the fourth factor affecting voter's turnout among the University Students is identified as the access to internet and e-voting procedures. It is observed that about 41.8 per cent of the University Students strongly agreed to this assertion. A large proportion which cumulates to 37.3 per cent simply agreed to the assertion. It is observed that 4.5 per cent of the Students were undecided. A proportion which amounts to 8.9 per cent disagreed with this assertion whereas a total of 7.5 per cent of the University students strongly disagreed to this assertion.

A cumulative total of 79.1 per cent of the students simply agreed to this assertion while a total of about 16 per cent of the students disagreed to this assertion. This means that the access to internet and e-voting procedures among student was a strong factor that determined political participation in term of voters' turnout among the students.

5. Independent Student Electoral Commission (ISEC) conduct has been fair

This is factor that tests the students' trust on the ISEC. A good trust is expected to pull a good voters' turnout.

	Response	Percentage Response
Strongly Agreed	15	21%
Agreed	29	41%
Undecided	9	13%
Disagreed	12	17%
Strongly Disagreed	5	7%

Table V

Source: Researchers Fieldwork (2015)

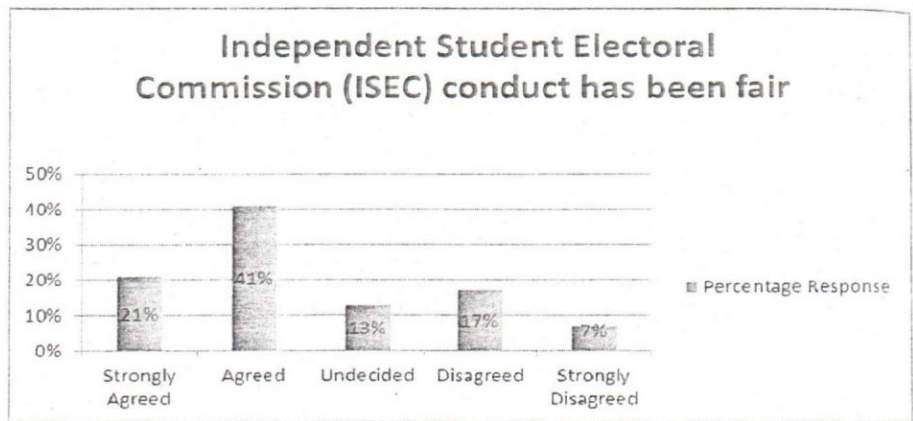


Figure V

From the table five above, the other factor that affects student political participation and adequate turnout in the election was the level of fairness in the conduct of the Independent Student Electoral Commission (ISEC). It is observed from the table V above that 21 per cent of the students strongly agreed that the election conduct by the independent electoral commission (ISEC) determined the voters' turnout. A large portion of the students which cumulates to 41 per cent simply agreed to this assertion.

It is observed that 13 per cent of the students were undecided and a proportion which amount to 17 per cent of the students' population disagreed to this assertion, whereas a total of 7 per cent of the students strongly disagree to this assertion. A cumulative total of 62 per cent of the students

simply agree to this assertion while a total of 24 per cent of the students disagreed to this assertion. This means that the level of fairness in the conduct of the Independent Student Electoral Commission (ISEC) was a strong factor that determined political participation in term of voters' turnout among the students.

6. Student Union Election is being influenced by external body

The impact of external bodies such as the lecturers and the school authority is tested on the rate of voters' turnout in elections. A negative influence is expected to yield a poor voters' turnout.

	Response	Percentage Response
Strongly Agreed	19	27%
Agreed	16	23%
Undecided	11	16%
Disagreed	19	27%
Strongly Disagreed	5	7%

Table VI

Source: Researchers Fieldwork (2015)

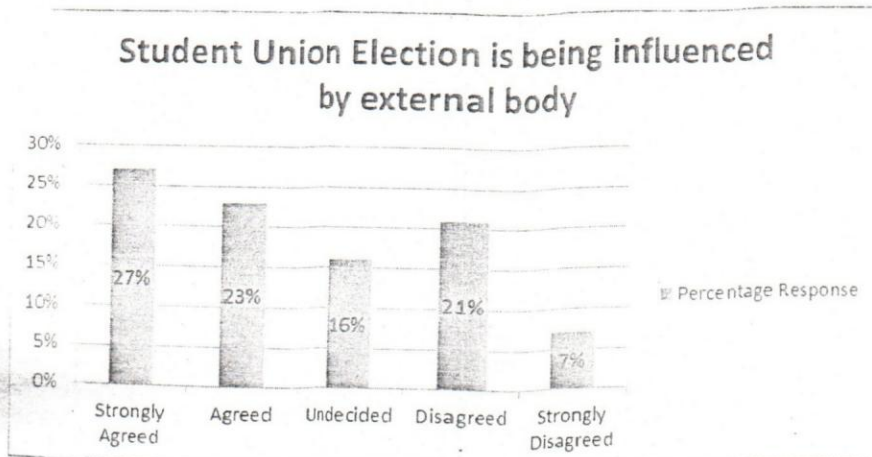


Figure VI

From the table IV above, it is observe from table VI above that 27 per cent of the students strongly agreed that influence of the external body determined the voters' turnout in the student union election. A large portion of students which cumulates to 23 per cent simply agreed to this assertion. It is observed that 16 per cent of the students were undecided.

A proportion which amounts to 27 per cent of the student's population disagreed to this assertion, whereas a total of 9 per cent of the students strongly disagreed to this assertion. A cumulative total of 50 per cent of the students, simply agreed to the assertion that external body determined the voters' turnout in the election while a total of 34 per cent of the University students disagreed with this assertion. This implies that the influence of the external body was a strong and potent factor that determined political participation in term of voters' turnout among the students.

Recommendations

From the foregoing findings, the following stakeholders are expected to consider the following recommendations so as to ensure adequate and proportional representations among the student in subsequent students' elections.

The University Management: The level of involvement of the school management in the ISEC activities should be limited to advisory and monitoring roles. There is a greater need to restructure the Independent Student Electoral Commission and grant unto them political autonomy and be free from external influence. This will go a long way to presenting the right choice of the electorates in the University of Ilorin Student Union election. A relative free lecture day should be declared for all the students during the election or voting period and after it elapsed, lecture should commence so as to allow students to come to the school and do the duo of voting and lectures together instead of the outright lecture free day trends.

The Independent Student Electoral Commission: ISEC should consider the need to early sensitization of the student community of the voting patterns and other requirements so that qualified candidates can adequately prepare for the exercise. There is also the need to look into the e-voting stringent registration procedures which denies few Students the opportunity to participate in the electoral process. The issue of accessibility to internet on the days of registration and on the Election Day is also paramount. It is

believed that by so doing the electorate would be in a position to exercise their rights and also defend their votes.

The Students: The Students community should desist from bandwagon voting pattern such as religious or ethnic affiliation and general voting apathy. Also the trend of voting because a friend is involved as well as apathy because all contestants are not familiar should be avoided. The electorate should move beyond voting along ethno-religious sentiment and should embrace democratic tenets for credible and accountable governance.

Conclusion

For democracy to survive it must encourage healthy competition for all elective positions as well as mass participation of the people with adequate right, responsibility and duty. The cardinal principles of democracy which include the entrenchment of the right of the people to participate in governance of all affairs that affect them through free, fair, regular and transparent democratic elections should be upheld. These democratic principles further mean that the legitimacy of authority is derived from the sovereignty of the people and there is compliance to the rule of law and those in authority are accountable and responsible based on the mandate to preside over people and other resources.

This Paper had assessed factors that affect voters' turnout and political participation in democratic settings using the student union elections in the University of Ilorin 2015 as a reference. The factors affecting voters' turnout in an election were enumerated and discussed; the rational choice theory was used to analyse the reasons why people decided to vote or as a reference not to participate in any political activities. Quantitative methodology was adopted using descriptive statistics to assess the reasons for voters' turnout and political participation among students is low.

The findings deduced from this work revealed that all the factors of the level of campaign by the contestant, the popularity of contestants, the E-voting procedure, level of ISEC fairness and external factor influence except the same gender factor strongly affect voters' turnout and political participation among the students. While a rapid response to political apathy culture of minimal and controlled school authority's involvement is recommendation, the conclusion is premised on the ground of building the nation's democracy from the grass root of tertiary institutions' student elections.

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