Peer Relationship and Electoral Behaviour among Undergraduates

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Abstract

The study examined peer relationships and electoral behaviour among Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, undergraduates. One hundred and ninety undergraduates, with a mean age of 21.63 years and a standard deviation of 2.95 years, who volunteered were chosen at random to participate in the study. Among them, 46.8% were males and 53.2% were females. The Index of Peer Relations Scale and the Electoral Behaviour Scale were the instruments used to gather data. A correlation design was used in the study, and Pearson Product moment correlation and Linear Regression were deployed for data analysis. The study found that the electoral behaviour of the participants is positively and significantly influenced by their peer relationships. It was recommended that undergraduates should be encouraged to interact with peers, who provide them with access to electoral information, as this might foster a good attitude about electoral behaviour and improve the sustainability of elections.

Keywords: ***Electoral Behaviour, Peer Relationship, Undergraduates***

1. Introduction

Globally, societies are experiencing a boom in their ability to exercise self-determination in elections. These societies comprise both official (schools) and informal (social networks) groupings and organisations. These groups discover newfound motivation in being able to participate in the democratic process, when making decisions that affect their life. Academics maintain that electoral behaviour is a universal occurrence (Cutler et al., 2021). In this sense, it is possible that the idea of exercising one's right to self-determination dates back more than six decades ago. However, most people link democracy with the work of the ancient Greeks, who were seen as the forerunners of Western civilization by intellectuals in the eighteenth century. These people tried to use these early democratic trials as a springboard for developing a new kind of post-monarchical political structure. Even, while the moral arguments of these 18th-century democratic revivalists frequently used may be contested, it is hard to argue against the degree to which they were successful in transforming the democratic ideals of the ancient Greeks into the pre-eminent political institution of the following 300 years. However, the resurgence of democratic institutions and ideals marked a turning point in history that profoundly altered the centuries that followed and shaped the global scene, ever since the last remnants of the empire were destroyed after World War II.

Nigeria is not an exception to the rule that most formal organisations, nations, social groupings, and ethnic groups around the world have come to accept democracy and its democratic system. According to scholars, voting is a civil right in democracies all around the world (Sindermann & Montag, 2021a, 2021b). Available data suggest that educational institutions at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels have persisted in exhibiting similar behaviours, when it comes to instituting different kinds of group leadership roles (Osuji et al., 2020). Within these establishments, undergraduate leadership positions are attained through electoral behaviour, which is encouraged by the school administration. Because of these measures, students experience the election process intensely, as do both candidates and the electorates. At this time, positions were sought after, and the only way to get them was by winning an election. Previous research looked at other aspects of electoral behaviours (Galli et al., 2021), local candidates, place-based identities, and electoral success (Schulte-Cloos, 2022), participatory attitude and electoral behaviour (Pastarmadzhieva et al., 2021), voters' decisions (Hansen & Tyner, 2021;

Hansen et al., 2007), and measuring voters' decision strategies on political behaviour (Ha & Lau, 2015). Nevertheless, it seems that the concepts of peer relationships and electoral behaviour were not given enough attention in these investigations. The study focused on this knowledge gap.

A wide range of academics have defined electoral behaviour as elevating citizens to a central role in the nation's political decision-making process (Balatif et al., 2018); a crucial component of citizen participation in a democratic system (Saud et al., 2020); a reflection of voters' degree of engagement in the electoral process (Lee, 2020); and an indication of citizens' interest in electoral issues within their community (Alelaimat, 2019). As a result, it is customary for electorates to be citizens to participate in the democratic process; yet, it seems that the political process might not be complete without the electorate taking part in the election process. The afore-mentioned definitions make it abundantly evident that electoral behaviour is a process rather than a result. This suggests that it is made up of many behaviours that electorates exhibit during the election process. Seven items are used by Nweke et al. (n.d.) to measure electoral behaviour. These include voting, volunteering for political organizations, talking to people and trying to persuade them to support or oppose a party or candidate; wearing a campaign cap; putting a political sticker on one's car; and receiving calls asking one to support or oppose a candidate for a political position.

Electoral behaviour, according to the researchers in this study, is the verbal and non-verbal behavioural expression of electorates' attitudes toward the electoral process as shown in things like wearing party polo, and shirts, putting party stickers on personal items, discussing their choice of candidates with other voters, and casting ballots. Thus, after the votes are cast, tabulated, and a winner is declared, the election process may have ended (Saud et al., 2020). Numerous advantages have been linked to electoral behaviour, including improved political awareness, general development, and a better ability to handle social and political issues (Hansen & Tyner, 2021; Hansen et al., 2007). Some argue for an expansion of private persons' ability to impact governmental policies and take part in democratic decision-making (Weiss, 2020). Because of these advantages, people come to believe that electoral behaviour is a crucial component of civic engagement in democracies (Saud et al., 2020). Works of literature indicate that the sociological model, the psychological model, and the economic theory are the three

electoral theories that have been used in the great majority of studies to understand electoral behaviour. Available record suggests that academic research on electoral behaviour dates back to the 1950s, before the emergence of the models mentioned above (Guo, 2020).

According to Lee and Lee (2021), a peer relationship is an interpersonal bond formed and grown via conversation between people who have comparable psychological development levels. In a similar vein, peer relationships are defined by Rutland et al. (2012) as a ubiquitous feature of social life from an early age, and based on their interactions, youngsters frequently choose not to participate in social activities and outings. Although, it seems that peer relationships are a crucial part of adolescent growth, not all teenagers can create positive relationships to the same extent. Research findings indicate that teenagers are involved in peer relationships, and this correlation may have a widespread effect (Laursen & Veenstra, 2021a). As a result, peer relationship occurs when someone acts or thinks during a relationship with peers; this effect might be linked to past experiences with friends and affiliates (Laursen & Veenstra, 2021b). Moreover, peer relationships are described by Laursen & Veenstra (2021a) as situations in which an individual influences or is influenced by one or more individuals who are of a similar age. Ultimately, academics maintain that electoral behaviour is a social-political construct and an international phenomenon that people from all walks of life have adopted (Cutler et al., 2021). The extent to which elections are practiced in each country may have an impact on the success of those nations. As a result, the degree of self-consciousness people exhibit may have an impact on the national election results. In the same vein, undergraduates, who are of voting age may be more engaged in and successful in elections, if they have positive peer relationships.

Statement of the Problem

It has been observed that many undergraduate students do not participate in voting, even though it is an important part of the electoral process and a form of civic responsibility. Often, these students only participate in electoral activities, because their peers ask them to. However, recent research has explored the positive impact of peer pressure, particularly through social networks, on electoral behaviour and the flow of political communication (Jorge da Silva Antunes, 2010), the political influence (a component of electoral behaviour) of peer groups (Campos et al., 2017b), and peer effects and political participation: the role, of course, work clusters (Ajilore &

Alberda, 2017). It seems that previous studies have failed to explore the connection between peer relationships and electoral behaviour. Since undergraduates over the age of 18 are considered part of the youth population and make up a significant proportion of this group, it is essential to focus on them in the present study. The gaps in knowledge identified have motivated this study, which aims to investigate the role of peer relationships in predicting electoral behaviour among undergraduates at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Objective of the Study

To examine if peer relationships will significantly and positively predict electoral behaviour among undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Research Question

Will peer relationships significantly predict electoral behaviour among undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of the study was Ajzen's theory of planned behaviour (1991). This is because electoral behaviour, which is goal-directed behaviour, may be influenced by attitudes, personality traits, subjective standards, and perceived behavioural control. Moreover, the theory of planned behaviour recognized the independent variable in this investigation. Peer relationships, for example, are represented by attitudes. Ajzen (1991) posits that goal-directed behaviour, (electoral behaviour), might result from attitudes.

Empirical Review

Schulte-Cloos and Bauer (2021) conducted a study on local candidates, electoral performance, and placed-based identities, which is a component of peer relations. 11,175 citizens took part in the study as participants. According to the findings, peers strongly favour local candidates even in non-competitive situations. Based on the members of the group's in-group favouritism, the study by Schulte and Bauer (2021) is comparable to the current investigation into place-based identification. Peers receive the same degree of psychological advantages. Accordingly, the researcher postulates that during elections, individuals, who share similar peers may exhibit loyalty to candidates, who share their demographic. A study on the political impact of peer

groups: experimental evidence in the classroom was published by Campos et al. (2017b). The findings showed that individual identity is influenced by peer political identification. Peer interaction also influences political identification. Both the current investigation and the study by Schulte and Bauer (2021) seem to be comparable to the study by Campos et al. (2017). The current study's researcher posits that electoral behaviour may be influenced by peer relationships. What roles do coursework clusters have in peer effects and political participation? was investigated by Ajilore and Alberda (2017). The findings demonstrated that peers, who participate in extra-curricular activities and those who do better in social studies classes influenced one another. The current research on peer relationships, as well as the studies of Schulte and Bauer (2021) and Campos et al. (2017), seem to be comparable to the work of Ajilore & Alberda (2017). According to a study by Laursen & Veenstra (2021a), college students in West Java, Indonesia, who were first-time voters used the media (a favourable attribute of peer relationship) to help them make voting judgments. 1066 college students from six public colleges in West Java, Indonesia, who were first-time voters participated. The findings demonstrated that voting decisions (a component of electoral behaviour) were highly influenced by social media interactions with radio, newspapers, and television. Similar findings to the current study are found in the works of Schulte and Bauer (2021), Campos et al. (2017), and Laursen & Veenstra (2021a). The idea of social media now carries with it the idea of youth involvement in politics. In the Philippine senatorial election, Batara et al. (2021) published a study on the determinants influencing youth voting preferences: a structural equation modelling (SEM) analysis. Youth is a favourable attribute of peer relations. The study included 210 young, educated voters as participants. A structural equation connecting the respondent's party identity and voting preferences was used as the statistics. It does not seem like issue orientation or candidate orientation are important independent variables. The current study and the previous investigations by Laursen & Veenstra, (2021a), Schulte and Bauer (2021), and (Campos et al., 2017a) seem to be comparable to the study conducted by Batara et al. in 2021.

Hypothesis

Peer relationships among undergraduates at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, will significantly and positively influence their electoral behaviour.

METHOD

Sample

Participants were drawn from a total of 190 undergraduate males and females from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Participants' descriptive distribution was (46.8%) males and (53.2%) females. The age range was 18-36 years with a mean age of 21.63 years and a standard deviation of 2.95. Three students were married (1.6%), while a total of 187 (98.4%) were single. The whole 190 undergraduates were Christians. All participants had senior secondary school certificates (SSCE). A total of 107 (56.3%) undergraduates were registered voters, while 83 (43.7%) were unregistered voters. Also, 16 undergraduates were registered members of political parties, while 174 (91.6%) were not. All participants did not have any occupation. Participants' levels of study were 100-level 39 (20.5%), 200-level 89 (46.8%), 300-level 16 (8.4%), and 400-level 46 (24.2%). Eighty-eight 88 (46.3%) were attached to social groups, while 102 (52.7%) were not. Also, 137 (72.1%) were registered with religious groups, while 53 (27.9%) were not registered with any religious group.

Design

The study adopted a correlational design, while the statistic used for data management was descriptive, Pearson Product-Moment Correlations Coefficient and Linear Regression Analysis Enter Method.

Instruments

Two instruments were used for data collection: The electoral behaviour scale, and the Index of Peer Relations. Nweke et al., (n.d.) developed the electoral behaviour scale (EBS). The electoral behaviour scale is a seven-item questionnaire that examines several aspects of people's voting behaviour. The items on the electoral behaviour scale range from strongly agree-5 to strongly disagree-1 on a five-point Likert scale. Some of the things on the scale are: I have frequently volunteered for political organizations in the previous 12 months, and I have frequently voted in the past 12 months. Nweke et al., (n.d.) reported an alpha coefficient of .86. Furthermore, using correlation coefficient, tests for convergence and divergence validity revealed that EBS was positively associated with the Life satisfaction scale ($r = .03$, $p < .05$), and Self-esteem ($r = .49$, $P < .05$), but negatively associated with organizational frustration ($r = -.45$, $P > .05$), and trait

anxiety inventory (r = -.32, P >.05). In another study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient of the Electoral Behavior Scale was reported to be .76 (Nweke et al., n.d.-c). the researcher in the present study found a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .82, Split-half Cronbach alpha Part 1 =.766, Part 2 = .634, while Spearman-Brown coefficient of equal length was .778 and Unequal length was .781. Gutter-man Split-Half Coefficient was .748.

The Index of peer relations scale was developed by Hudson (1992). The scale was developed to measure how one perceives relationships with peers. Items on the index of peer relationship were recorded on a five-point Likert scale with 1-strongly disagree, -5 strongly agree. The index of the peer relationship scale is a 25-item questionnaire. The reliability of the Index of peer relations scale was established at the .89 Cronbach alpha coefficient. A random selection of the several faculties at Nnamdi Azikiwe University in Awka was done by the researchers. These faculties included the Faculties of Education, Management Sciences, Engineering, Biology, Physics, Law, Agriculture, and Environmental Sciences. Following a basic random selection procedure, the Physical Sciences faculty was chosen to function as the study's sample frame. Moreover, two departments were chosen at random for the study: Computer Science and Physics. The researcher assured the participants that their privacy would be maintained and that the study was being conducted for educational purposes before starting to administer the questionnaires. The study's participants were limited to willing and consenting undergraduates. The requirements for inclusion included meeting the age limit of eighteen and being included in the study sample. The study was conducted by the researcher using accidental random sampling from the first year of study to the fourth year of study. A total of 250 copies of the questionnaires were distributed to the students; 190 of those were found to be correctly completed, and they were then subjected to data analysis using version 22 of the Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS).

RESULTS

Table 1: Zero-order correlation matric using raw data

		1	2	3
1	Electoral behavior	1		
2	Peer relations	.132	1	

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 1 shows the zero-order correlation coefficient of the studied variables. There was a positive correlation between electoral behaviour and peer relationships at r=.132, P< .05.

Table 2: Standardize Beta Coefficient Result for Independent Effects of Peer Relation, and on Electoral Behaviour

Predictor variable	Adjusted R^2	$Df^i(df^2)$	F	β	Sig
Model 1 Electoral Behaviour	.008	1(187)	1.765		
a. Peer relation				.127*	.051

*p<.05

The one model was analysed independently using the multiple regression enter method. The following outcomes were obtained. Table 2 showed that when enter method was applied to electoral behaviour for independent predictors peer relations, the adjusted R^2 was .008. This revealed that the model contributed .8% to understanding electoral behaviour. The ANOVA summary (f-ratio) shows that the adjusted R^2 value was not significant at f (2,187) = 1.765, p>.05. Specifically, the unstandardized beta value for peer relation was (β=.127*, P < .05.

Discussion

The study adopted a correlational design, while the statistic used for data management was descriptive, Pearson product-moment correlations coefficient and Linear regression analysis enter method. The study's findings supported the hypothesis. According to past research, peer

relationships and voting behaviour are positively correlated (Campos et al., 2017; Schulte & Baueer, 2021). These results align with the current investigation. The nature of the associations that exist among peers who are undergraduates may explain the phenomenon. It seems that a large number of undergraduates are politically aware through this manner. As a result, they might start concentrating more on electoral issues than other circular ones. As a consequence, discussions over who should be the most ideal candidate in the school or the community may have dominated peer relations during election events, investigating potential candidates' prospectuses and how the public could benefit from them often involves paying them a visit and conducting interviews. Additionally, if the electorate's impressions of favourable attitudes gradually take hold, they may be forced to participate in school or community socialisation programmes to persuade more of their peers about how they might win over more voters. Likewise, peers' unrestricted freedom to voice their thoughts may also lead to electoral victory. Under these conditions, it becomes evident that all undergraduates are very liberated to express their electoral emotions and ideas. In the previous example, it was quite simple for a peer to reach out to other peers and acquire political relevance once they were happy with a party's or candidate's electoral mission. In addition, it is critical to note that peers communicate using a new language. Applying this new terminology to group models between themselves is always simple. One possible explanation for the importance could be the shared flat status that each member has with the other. Now, it may always be simple to view things from a public, rather than a personal perspective, when each peer is aware that none of them is superior in terms of income or other unique privileges.

The results of the current study may be explained by the concept of planned behaviour. The theory of planned behaviour states that there are indirect relationships between personality traits and attitudes. Consequently, increased electoral activity is anticipated to result from a favourable attitude toward electoral behaviour as per the TPB. Participants expressed a favourable attitude regarding electoral behaviour as a result. According to this idea, those who have a favourable attitude toward electoral behaviours are more likely to overcome subjective norms. Thus, the term "subject norm" refers to the accepted manner of living in a certain culture. In the unlikely event that a culture rejects electoral behaviour. According to the TPB, a person who has a favourable outlook on electoral behaviour will be able to defeat subjective norms that have the

opposite view. In a similar vein, if the electorate's personality attribute appears to be extraversion or openness to experience (Nweke et al., 2022), the electorate now starts to assess his or her resources for electoral behaviour. Examining current knowledge, financial resources, personality types, encouraging friends, and personal convictions on the electoral project are all part of this process. The electorate will be able to acquire perceived behavioural control, if these assessments are well received.

As a result, goal-directed behaviour is better predicted by perceived behavioural control. An electorate starts to plot how to accomplish electoral behaviours as he becomes more aware of his ability to control behaviour. Such preparations emerge when voters start to map out how much money they will need for transportation, offer to pay for those who cannot afford it to support a campaign and donate money to print party colours on t-shirts, caps, stickers, party offices' residences, and cars. Each of these actions serves as a symbol indicating a party affiliation. Sadly, using the party supplies mentioned-above has resulted in the deaths of some citizens. As a result, to members of the community, such behaviours as exemplified by objects of components origin communicate volumes. Peer relationships have a strong perceived behavioural control, which helps them overcome obstacles related to electoral actions.

Conclusion

Undergraduates' electoral behaviour was found to be positively influenced by their peer relationships. Undergraduates may be able to increase their level of electoral attitude, if they engage in productive participation in town hall meetings, seminars, and electoral discussions. Undergraduates may favourably influence others toward the same attitude since they typically behave in norm-approved, group-motivated ways, if they are convinced of an electoral viewpoint. This increases the number of individuals, who support democratic norms. The study suggests that to compel peers who are not involved in electoral behaviour to adopt a positive attitude toward it, parents, guardians, politicians, the current government, and school authorities should support undergraduates by offering scholarships, holding debates, subsidizing school transportation, providing sports facilities, and other recreational amenities.

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