



Review Article

Electoral Incentives and Electoral Preferences in Democracy: The 2015 Governorship Election of Bayelsa State as a Case Study

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Abstract: This work investigates the relationship between electoral incentives and voter preferences in Nigeria, using the 2015 Bayelsa governorship election as a case study. The study found that political elites capitalize on the heterogeneity of the Nigerian society to manipulate the electorate by prying on the primordial sentiments of groups as well as vulnerabilities to illegally motivate voters to curry support during elections. The study also found that although explicit economic incentives are common feature in Nigerian elections, it is altruistic incentives such as group identity priming and party loyalty that motivate electorates to vote rather than societal objectives based on the candidate's policies and projects. There is also the case of outright vote buying that has characterized the Nigerian electoral system. This study therefore established a very strong relationship between electoral incentives and voter preference. It is therefore recommended that the three arms of government in Nigeria should work together to ensure that all forms of monetary inducements by candidates are treated as serious offences and punished appropriately.

Keywords: Electoral Incentives, Electoral Preference, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

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INTRODUCTION

In modern democracies, electorate express their preferences for candidates in elections through voting. By their votes, the electorate can determine who occupies a position of authority. Whoever becomes a winner in an election is therefore seen as the preferred candidate of the people. This process is simply the making of social preference in what is known as social choice theory.

Voters, while deciding on whom to vote in, are confronted with conflicting alternatives especially in a developing country like Nigeria. A number of issues tend to sway the potential voters preference. These issues could be explicit economic incentives such as votes buying, expected political appointment, and distribution of infrastructure etc. or implicit incentives such as norms, ethics and relationships. The use of incentives and material gains in elections has become a culture in Nigeria and voters have become accustomed to receiving bribes no matter how small, in exchange for their votes, Adeleke (2016).

Political candidates seeking elections do promise different incentives that align with the views of the electorate to woo them into voting them in elections. It is a common practice in Nigeria for politicians to make bogus promises which they cannot fulfill just to curry votes to win elections. Election results will come out and people see candidates with poor credentials win elections over more qualified candidates. Underhand tactics of vote buying and political intimidation are also very common. According to Bratton (2008) no less than one out of five Nigerians is personally exposed to vote buying and one in ten experiences

threats of electoral violence. In sane democracies, the electorate are supposed to vote for their choice of candidate without such illegal incentives and motivations. Though the electoral law forbids these unwholesome practices politicians continue to circumvent the process for their personal political gains. The questions therefore, are: (i.) 'are electoral preferences by the electorate 'determined by the electoral incentives put forward by political candidates'? (ii.) Is there a relationship between electoral incentives and voter preferences in Nigeria'? This is what this study set out to investigate using the 2015 gubernatorial election of Bayelsa State as a case study.

To achieve the above objectives, the paper is structured as follows: the introduction which examines the background and objectives of the study, followed by the literature review. After this, an analysis of 2015 elections in bayelsa state is undertaken. Thereafter, the instruments and data used in the study are discussed which is followed by the discussion of the findings of the study . The concluding remarks are contained in the last section of the paper.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Following the work of Kenneth Arrow in the 80s, social choice theory has generated much discourse and literature in mainstream economics. One of the major areas of concern has been the determination of social preference on an economic phenomenon. It basically deals with the aggregation of individual preferences to form social preference. The literature on voter manipulation for electoral gain is relatively scanty especially as it

concerns Nigeria. However the available literature indicates the existence of the phenomenon.

There is empirical evidence indicating the manipulation of the electoral rules as well as resource allocation or distribution of incentives by incumbents to influence aggregate votes in election to their favour. Though the evidence also reveal electorates using same electoral process to influence candidates in currying personal incentives as well as public incentives, at the end, the electoral outcome is determined by how well the electorates are motivated by the incentives before them, see (Duma 2015, Persson and Tebelini 1999, 2003)

Adeleke (2016), asserted that voters were enticed with both monetary and material gifts during the 2014 and 2015 Governorship elections in the South-west of Nigeria to influence their voting pattern. He further insisted that money and gift inducements seems to erode the confidence of voters on political manifestoes as in most cases the electorates never feel the dividends of voting in an election therefore a resolve to accept cash and material incentives to vote.

Bratton (2009) asserts that most ordinary people resist efforts by political elite to illegally influence voter behavior. But the society's poorest and vulnerable has little choice but to accept. This assertion could be very true especially in recent years where "stomach infrastructure" lexicon has crept into electoral campaigns, which simply refers to enticing citizens with handouts to curry electoral support. Van de Walle (2003) suggested that, in Nigeria voters take vote buying offers as signals of a patron's wealth and capability of winning elections, features of a leader they wish to be associated with.

One common feature that has crept into electioneering in Nigeria is the priming of group identity for political manipulation by politicians. Politicians target a group on either their ethnic or religious leaning and feed on their fears or aspirations to manipulate same for electoral success. Because Nigeria is a heterogeneous society, such groups identities are abundant and are easily manipulated. In the run up to the 2015 general elections all sorts of campaign gimmicks were used and on Election Day, vote buying was witnessed as Adeleke (2016) observed. There was also excessive use of group identity priming and manipulation in the run up to the 2015 general elections. Religion and ethnicity was used as selling points by the two major parties, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressives Congress (APC) which could have played an important role in voter preferences during the election.

The fact that Nigeria is a heterogeneous society consisting of different tribes and classes of people ranging from upper class, middle class and a lower class consisting of the poor and very poor makes it susceptible for electoral manipulation. The political elite using various forms of electoral incentives takes advantage of the situation to perpetuate the illegality. We can broadly put these incentives into economic and altruistic incentives. Economic incentives include, vote buying, expected political gains and policy and projects. On the other hand altruistic incentives include group identity, party loyalty and morality. Does a relationship exist between electoral incentives and voters' preferences in the conduct of elections in Nigeria will remain the theme of this study.

The Bayelsa 2015 Election: Issues That Shaped the Polls

The results of the 2015 gubernatorial elections may have been influenced by the following issues which still follow the electoral incentives highlighted so far.

1. The Ijaw factor: prior to the election, Idio, Emem in the Vanguard newspaper highlighted that Bayelsa State prides itself as the only homogenous Ijaw state but even at that some parts consider themselves as more Ijaw than the

others. He went further to explain the "core Ijaw" lexicon banded by politicians to curry support from the electorates. Five out of the eight LGAs including, Kolokuma/Opokuma, Sagbama, Ekeremor, Southern-Ijaw and parts of Yenagoa are seen as core Ijaw. The incumbent Seriake Dickson is of this stock. Timipre Sylva is main challenger is from those considered non-core by political gladiators even though his native Brass LGA speaks a variant of the Ijaw language. They include Nembe, Ogbia and Brass. Numerically the core is more than the non-core and politicians, especially those loyal to the Governor used this group identity to prime prospective voters.

2. The Jonathan and PDP factor: the Bayelsa governorship election came after the presidential election which president Goodluck Jonathan, an indigene of the State lost as PDP candidate to Gen. Muhammadu Buhari of the APC. The defeat of Jonathan was therefore primed as a defeat to Bayelsa and PDP in the state. Consequently, sentiments were whipped up to be against anything APC and Sylva being the APC candidate was seen as an opposition to the aspirations of the state. Many according to Idio will vote the PDP not because of Dickson but as a payback for the defeat of Jonathan.
3. Performance: both candidates had term of office under their belt where the electorates can assess their performance in office. The campaign therefore also centered on what they achieved infrastructure and policy wise during their first tenures.

When the election came these items tend to play a major role in the outcome. The issue of group identity, party loyalty and the performance of the candidate in office were some of the issues that determine the voting pattern. It is therefore inevitable to use them as variables in the model to determine their relationship with the expression of preference by the electorates.

Instruments and Data

A simple survey instrument using questionnaire was applied in sourcing the data for analysis. As a first step, the questionnaire aside the bio-data of respondents, seek to elicit response on the incentives that motivate electorates to vote for a particular candidate in the 2015 Bayelsa governorship election. Four questions were put forward on vote buying, candidates policy and projects direction, party loyalty and group identity.

The responses were collated to form the basis for further analysis using frequencies and chi square analysis to determine the impact of each explanatory variable on voter preference which is the latent variable.

The Model

This study is carried out with the assumption that an individual preference in voting a particular candidate is motivated by explicit economic incentives and altruism. Where the economic incentives considered are; vote buying, and the candidate's policies and projects implemented or expected to be implemented.

Altruistic Motivations Include Group Identity And Party Loyalty.

In light of the above we can form a functional relationship in which voter preference is a function of vote buying, policy and projects, group identity and party loyalty.

MATHEMATICALLY:

$$VP = f(VB, PP, GI, PL)$$

WHERE:

VP is voter preference;

VB is vote buying

PP is policies and projects implemented or expected

GI is group identity

PL is party loyalty

Instrumentation, Data Collection and Analyses

We designed a simple survey questionnaire carrying two parts. The first part contains the relevant bio-data of the respondent which include age and residential area. The second part deals directly with the 2015 Bayelsa State governorship election. Five sets of questions were asked, starting with if the respondent voted in the election. This is then followed by questions on the motivations of the respondent in voting a particular candidate, highlighting the four incentives of vote buying, projects and policies, group identity and party loyalty as driving forces. On each of this questions, the respondent is to answer in the affirmative (agree) or indifferent (don't know) or negative (disagree).

The responses helped in forming a Likert table which is then analyzed first with frequencies and percentages then a further relationship and significance test using chi square.

Descriptive Statistics

In carrying out the survey of voters in the 2015 governorship election in the state, I designed an instrument that elicited responses from one hundred voters with particular reference to incentives that motivate voters in the election. Those incentives as highlighted earlier include vote buying, policies and project execution by the candidates, the group identity of the voter based on either clan, local council of origin or electoral constituency, and party loyalty.

The questions were direct as to whether a voter voted base on the above criteria which they are to tick agrees, disagree or don't know to be indifferent.

The Summary of Questions and Responses:

1. Why Did You Vote the Candidate?

a) Because I was paid.

Out of the one hundred respondents, 38 agreed to being paid to vote a particular candidate. A further 10 agreed being paid but remain indifferent as to who they voted for while 52 persons were never influenced by vote buying.

So we have a situation where 38% of voters voted because they were influenced by money and a further 10% could have behaved either way. The good thing though is the fact that, despite the high level of monetization of the election, 52% which is above average were not influenced with money to vote.

A) I Like His Policies And Project Execution.

In the response to this question, 42% agreed they were influenced by the policies and level of projects executed by the candidate. 44% were indifferent to the type of policies or projects that were executed to vote their choice candidate while 14% totally disagree to voting because of policy or projects.

B) We Are From the Same (Clan, Local Council Area, and Constituency).

In responding to this criterion, 72% agreed to voting because the candidate shares same geographical area with them based on clan (dialect community), local government area or electoral constituency. 8% were indifferent to such identity while 20% were never moved by it. In the literature review, I highlighted the priming of group identity for political gain; it was exploited in the 2015 general election both at the national and state levels. As the percentage here indicates, voters' primordial sentiments concerning their group identities were effectively primed by politicians for the election.

C) He Is My Party Candidate.

In responding to party loyalty, 70% voted because the candidate is from their party. 20% were indifferent to party affiliation while 10% disagree on voting based on party affiliation.

In summary, the 2015 governorship election was greatly influenced by group identity and party loyalty which was exploited by politicians. Both are altruistic and tend to have greater impact on motivating voter preferences amassing up to 70% of voter preference.

Explicit economic incentives such as vote buying and project allocation were both less than 50% of the votes cast. This indicates that, despite the level of monetization, voters tend to vote more on altruistic reasons. A closer look at the 2015 presidential election may attest to this as the outcome of the election, where then incumbent president Goodluck Jonathan failed to win the election despite outpacing then opposition candidate, Gen. Muhamadu Buhari in during the election.

Chi Square Test of Significance

Table1: Respondents' frequency distribution

Variables	AGREE Frequency	DON'T KNOW frequency	DISAGREE frequency	TOTAL
VB	38	10	52	100
PP	42	44	14	100
GI	72	8	20	100
PL	70	10	20	100
TOTAL	222	72	106	400

Source: researcher's own computation.

THE CHI SQUARE FORMULA IS:

$$\chi^2 = (f_o - f_e) / f_e$$

WHERE:

F_o is frequency of observed data.

F_e is frequency of expected value of each cell.

From the respondents' frequency table above, we can create a chi square table to calculate for the chi square significance test.

Table2. Chi square analysis table.

Observed	Expected	O-E	(O-E) ²	(O-E) ² /E
38	55.5	17.5	306.25	5.518
10	18	8	64	3.556
52	26.5	25.5	650.5	24.55
42	55.5	13.5	182.25	3.283
44	18	26	676	37.56
14	26.5	12.5	156.25	5.896
72	55.5	16.5	272.25	4.955
8	18	10	100	5.556
20	26.5	6.5	42.25	1.594
70	55.5	14.5	210.25	3.788
10	18	8	64	3.555
20	26.5	6.5	42.25	1.708

Source: Researcher's calculation.

THE SUM OF (O - E)²/E THE FIFTH COLUMN IS 101.5

Chi Square Therefore Is:

$$\chi^2 = 105.5$$

TEST OF HYPOTHESES.

Two Hypotheses Are Given:

The null hypothesis (H₀): there exist no relationship between voter preference and electoral incentives.

Alternative hypothesis (H₁): relationship exists between voter preference and electoral incentives.

Decision Rule:

Reject H_0 if $\chi^2 \geq$ the critical probability value and accept H_1 .

We reject the null hypothesis if the χ^2 is greater than the critical probability value given the degree of freedom.

DEGREE OF FREEDOM DF IS:

DF = column - 1 multiplied by row - 1

FROM OUR FREQUENCY TABLE:

DF = (3-1)(4-1) = 2x3 = 6

DF = 6

USING CHI SQUARE DISTRIBUTION TABLE WITH A PROBABILITY OF 0.05, AT 6 DF, THE CRITICAL VALUE IS 1.237.

$\chi^2 = 101.5 \geq 1.237$

Based on the result above, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate is accepted. This is to say that there exist relationships between electoral incentives and voter preferences in Bayelsa State. The finding is statistically significant at 5% probability that voter preferences are related to electoral incentives.

Findings of the Study

This study set out to determine if a relationship exists between electoral preferences of voters and electoral incentives. Using survey instrument to elicit data from respondents, the work revealed that 72% and 70% of respondents voted for a candidate because they have a shared group identity with the candidate or they belong to same political party respectively. This finding is in tandem with Bratton (2008) which identified priming of group identities by political entrepreneurs to garner votes in elections.

In determining if there exist a relationship between electoral incentives and preferences the study revealed that a positive relationship exists between the two. The chi square result of 101.5 is greater than the critical p- value of 1.237 at 6 degrees of freedom. This led to the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis that a relationship exists. At a probability level of 0.05, 1.237 is positive and statistically significant.

Using descriptive statistics, our percentages of 72% and 70% indicate that voters voted for altruistic reasons as proxies of party loyalty and place of origin with the candidates. For explicit economic incentives such as vote buying and projects and policies of the candidates, only 38% voted because they were paid while only 42% were influenced by the policies and projects executed by the candidate.

Contrary to popular opinion, 38% and 42% are less than half of the respondents that voted. The belief that voters are induced by monetary enticements to vote a particular candidate during elections, see, (Adeleke 2009 and Bratton 2008) is rather weak. Though economic motivation is positive it is not a major reason why people vote a candidate of their choice. Rather it is group identities such as, religion, ethnicity or party association that plays a major role in motivating the electorate as the 70% and 72% respectively for both variables indicates. In the 2015 gubernatorial election of Bayelsa state, same clan or Local Government Area of origin with the candidate played a crucial role as both the PDP and APC candidates won their LGAs convincingly. This lays credence to Amat and Wibbels (2009) that group identities of electorates are primed by politicians to curry support. This same scenario played prominently in the run-up to the election through the use of the core Ijaw lexicon.

Concluding Remarks

There is high difference between the altruistic and economic incentives in terms of percentage. Taking a cursory look at group identity and policy projects, we discover that while 72% of voters voted based on group identity (clan, LGA, electoral constituency) and only 44% voted because they were impressed or moved by the policies or projects of the candidate. For a developing country this poses a major challenge. The implication is that a political candidate will be voted to office even when he does not perform well in his first term or intellectually sound enough to proffer policy solutions to issues but as long as he is favoured by his group where such group is in majority.

That only less than half the sample size agrees to vote a candidate due to his policies and projects is also a cause for concern. This indicates either the candidate performed poorly in policy formulation or voters don't really care about performance or are not enlightened enough to understand performance in office. Both scenarios are detrimental to the citizens' power of voting a candidate that can perform or where he fails, same voter power could be used to push him out of office. In a fledgling democracy like Nigeria, the ability to vote a candidate based on credibility and performance in office is what will spur politicians to work hard while in authority. From our findings it seems electorates are not voting on this basis rather it is primordial sentiments such as kinship and party loyalty that forms the biggest motivators. This could also explain why politicians play the group identity card (ethnicity religion) in electoral schemes.

Clannish voting pattern tends to be a challenge in the country as even the 2015 presidential election results portrays such sentiments as both President Jonathan and Buhari won convincingly in their geo-political zones. As mentioned earlier, the Bayelsa election also portrayed same sentiments in terms of LGA results.

Based On The Findings Of This Study, We Recommend That:

1. There is the need to properly enlighten the general public on the need to vote candidates who are selfless, sincere and capable of delivering good governance rather than being induced by economic incentives. Relevant government agencies and NGOs will be useful in this regard.
2. It is high we started considering or amending our constitution to allow independent candidacy. This will address the issue of party loyalty and parties' preference of candidates that has not done the nation any good.
3. The three arms of government in Nigeria should work together to ensure that all forms of monetary inducements by candidates are treated as serious offences and punished appropriately.

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