



Rationale behind voters' choice of political aspirants: A case study of Ekiti state, Nigeria

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Abstract

Voters' decision-making process while selecting political candidates is a complicated phenomenon that is impacted by many different aspects. By examining the interactions between socio-demographic traits, political ideologies, economic factors, and emotional appeals, this study investigates the fundamental justifications that influence voters' decisions. This study's mixed methods approach, which combines survey data and key informants' interviews, showed that voters' choices are influenced by a complex interplay between contextual circumstances, emotional attachments and logical assessments. Voters' choices have a significant impact on how nation or state is structured politically. It is crucial for political candidates, job seekers and policy stakeholders to understand the factors that influence voters' choices. The study looks at the various elements that influence voters' decisions in Ekiti State, Nigeria. This study presents the factors that influence voters' selection of candidates in Ekiti State through a thorough synthesis, analysis and fieldwork of numerous studies. Economic interests and policy stances are important, but voters also value leadership traits, honesty and the candidate's capacity to understand their issues, according to the data. By illuminating the mental and emotional mechanisms that influence voters' choices and their consequences for democratic governance, this study advances our knowledge of election behaviour. The study recommended that more party carrying members should be involved in campaigning for their party aspirants to enable voters to be acquainted with the qualities of the aspirants which would help voters to choose the best and masses focused aspirants who would improve the lives of the people in Ekiti State.

Keywords: Rationale, voters' choice, political aspirants

Introduction

Generally, electoral process in Nigeria has faced various challenges, like voters' apathy, electoral violence, rigging of elections and lack of confidence in the electoral system. These issues notwithstanding, voters still participate in the electoral process and their choices have significant impacts for any state's democratic development such as Ekiti State. Understanding the rationale behind voters' choice of aspirants during elections in Nigeria appears crucial for improving the country's or state's electoral process and democratic development. Electoral reforms, voters' education programmes and policy initiatives aimed at promoting good leadership are vital in states in Nigeria including Ekiti State.

Amao and Alliu (2024) state that elections held in Nigeria are marked by tensions, accusations and counter-accusations, heated campaign, exchanging of blames between the ruling and the main opposition parties and other such concerns.

The election in Nigeria entails the selection of federal government representatives, and all the states within the country. Nigeria started its elections in 1959 [2], and there were numerous political parties (Oni *et al*, 2014, The Cable, 2019 and this day, 2022) [49, 56, 57]. It is a way of electing people who should be leaders to whom the people should have a right to vote and be voted. Nigeria has over 93.4 million qualified voters in the country. Nigeria holds elections in all levels of government. These include presidential election, the national assemble elections, governorship elections, state assembly and the local government elections among others. Nigeria has experienced changes in its political behavioural

environment, increasing risks to its political stability. Nigeria has witnessed a shift in its political environment of behaviour, posing a greater threat to its political stability.

The federal government of Nigeria elects a president to the office of the head of state. This is because the winner is supposed to receive the majority of votes and be at least 25 percent in two-thirds of the states and the capital territory. In case no one fits the two requirements, it will go to a second round between the two vote contestants (Saleh, 2023 [51] & This Day Live, 2024). The Nigerian National Assembly made up of the legislators are also elected by the voters. The National assembly is made up of two houses; the house of Representatives which consists of 360 elected members to serve a 4-year term of office in a single seat and the other house is the senate which is made up of 109 elected members to serve a term of 4 years. The thirty six states further consist of 3 senatorial districts that each have 1 senator and the Federal Capital Territory which also has 1 senator-representative (Goitom, 2012) [36]. Nigeria has a multi-party system having 2 or 3 strong parties and a 3rd party that is successful in the electoral process. Nonetheless, the presidency has been dominated by members of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) since it has been elected back since 1999 up to 2015 when All Progressive Congress (APC) came to power till the present date, which is 2026. The sitting president, the vice president and the Senate and House of Representatives representing their Constituencies were all re-elected in the 2023 [59] general elections.

Johari, (2011) [45] defined election as a process of selection of leaders in a democratic process during which the constitutional right to change government is legitimate. Election in Nigeria has been conducted since 1922. Since

that time, election has been conducted consistently up to the year 1960 when political independence was acquired over Nigeria as a result of Britain. Following independence, the elections were held in 1964 and the democratic rule was not long-lived due to bloody military coup. Nigeria abandoned the parliamentary system of governance and adopted the presidential system in 1979. It did not occur in a smooth transition to the aborted Third Republic in 1993 but it happened in 1999 when the fourth republic was born and continues to be the longest democratic transition in the country's history (Sule *et al*, 2020) ^[46]. Election is done in Nigeria at various levels. Under the 2023 ^[59] general elections, the seventh republic, the election office constitutionally includes the presidential, the senatorial, the federal House of Representatives, the gubernatorial state assembly, the chairmanship and councillorship (Nigerian 1999 constitution as amended).

An electoral action is the voting behaviour and choice. It is an amalgamation of personal and electoral action, which is expressed in an election, taking part in electoral campaigns and attending electoral rallies as part of supporting a candidate or a political party (Bratton *et al*, 2012) ^[22]. The connotation of the above is either active participation and non-participation of electorate in an electorate process. This implies that electorate vote as a representative of a certain political party or candidates / aspirants regardless of their political affiliation in a specific election in a given political system or a country (Amao, 2022; Amao and Ambali, 2023) ^[28, 53]. Research on political voting has concentrated on the factors that are likely to make voters vote (Guardado and Wantchekon, 2017) ^[38]. These studies prove that voters do not simply decide to vote overnight but are predisposed to other types of factors that are determined by long-term and short-term events (Heywood, 2013) ^[40]. The short term effects are election specific effects that may vary with each election. These effects could be the performance of the government or regime, the charisma of the aspirants and the state economy status. Examples of long term effects can be loyalty to the party that can be maintained over a reasonable time. One should take notice of the fact that party loyalty in certain cases can be part of short term effects. This is due to the fact that in certain democracies, particularly, the emerging democracies of Africa, the party loyalty can be revoked within a brief period of time. Personal interest, instead of party loyalty, takes precedence in such democracies. This paper examined the reasons why Ekiti State voters chose aspirants in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Election is a practice of electing a leader into an office democratically. Election is another important part of democratic process that incorporates various stages, either group, family, state and inter-state as the case is. Election is also another tool used in the recruitment of political leadership in a democratic society. It is the instrument to political democracy in election and the gate to majority sanction of government. Electioneering refers to a whole process where some categories of people attempt to vote in favour of candidates or aspirants in a democratic process (Dye, 2001) ^[32]. Bruno *et al* (2018) stated that electioneering process is a formal process whereby an individual is elected into a political office. The process of democratisation dispensation in Nigeria has been characterised by negative and positive influence in politics. In the majority of these

ugly phenomena, the absence of political interest of voters is being involved due to extensive rigging and political disinterest.

Voting behaviour or choice is the choice that a voter makes regarding their votes. This is based on a complicated interaction between the attitude of a voter and social voters. There are social factors, which comprise education, race, religion and degree of religiosity, social and economic class, regional traits, gender and age (ICPSR 2023) ^[26]. The decision making or choice of voters is not a rational activity but instead, it is also affected by the personal and social bias and enforced strong beliefs along with personality, traits, memory, emotions and other psychological factors (Caplan, 2007, Healy, Malhotra and Mo, 2010 and Beck, 2002) ^[16, 25, 39]. Voting advice applications can also influence the voting choice and make them avoid wasted votes by employing strategic voting (Alvarez & Nagler, 2000 and Garzia & Marschall, 2016) ^[5, 37].

The three factors or individual differences that affect the voting behaviour and choice based on the existing research are religion, class and gender. In recent past, voting cleavage has been moved over to how people vote to the candidates or aspirants that they perceive would best reflect their moral convictions and religious beliefs. The conventional views of a class vote, however, dictate a preference of working class to left leaning parties and of middle class to right leaning parties. The effects of the class voting are dependent on the environment and the location of politics. The opposite preferences and preferences are applied in many countries (Brooks, Nieuwbeerta&Manza 2006 ^[23] and Ben, 1919). Different criteria of decision are applied by citizens when they are called to exercise their right to vote on the aspirants (Andreadis and Chadjipedelis, 2006) ^[10]. Andreadis and Chadjipedelis, (2006) ^[10] also assert that in national elections, voters are likely to vote according to their ideologies, whereas, in local and regional elections, voters are likely to vote for those who have the potential to develop the area. Partisan voting is also a relevant reason why an individual votes and affects the voting patterns (Bartels, 2000) ^[5].

The citizens are not blank slates and they already have political habits which make them more likely to vote and political identities which make them either more likely to vote the current aspirant or the other. (Sideshaw, Grossmann & Lipsitz, 2023). Schofield and Reeves (2014) ^[52, 59] also state that voter loyalty normally determines voter behaviour or choice. The intention to vote the same party in the future is correlated with the satisfaction of the voter with what a political party has already done and handled a situation. Therefore, it follows that when the voter satisfaction with the performance of political party is high, then there are high chances that the vote will reoccur in a subsequent election. Besides, the data given to the voter plays an important role in the interpretation of the voting choice or behaviour. The voters are given this information; the information does not only determine which one to vote, but also whether he or she is going to vote at all (Palfrey & Poole, 1987) ^[50].

Researchers have found out that income is crucial determinant that can affect decision to vote (Alesina and Edward 2004) ^[3]. The richer income earners tend to vote a party; conversely, the poorer ones tend to lend their support to a party whose policies are seen to be congruent to lower social disparity (Bartels, 2008) ^[15]. They have also been

found to be influenced by the coalition and alliance politics, the formation of which was pre-electional or post-electional (Bergman, 2020).

One of the critical issues that should be taken into account when drawing conclusion about the voting process or preferences is sex. The gender is typically associated with such aspects as religion, job differences, race, ethnicity, education level and other aspects to have a specific multiplicative impact on voting decision. Research indicates that, there is a high likelihood of the political behaviour of women being more progressive in relation to learning policies. Women focus on such problems as healthcare, education and gender equality. Conversely, men will be more interested in the problems such as national security, economic development and traditional values. (Junn & Masuoka, 2020)^[46]. Concerns and beliefs in public policies have been associated with influences on choice of aspirants, among which are government performance and individual judgment of the attributes of aspirants. These variables are affected by other variables such as sex and gender (ICPSR 2023)^[26].

Traditionally, the main political power has been dominated by men. This under representative ratio still is present in present days as most of the top political positions still are held by men. This is a trend in even democracies where the political offices are technically open to both sexes. Millions of factors cause this difference, yet certain ones indicate that gender bias of voters has its part in keeping the gender gap in politics (Teele, Kalla & Rosenbluth, 2018; ICPSR, 2023^[26, 55]).

When it comes to the matter of public policy beliefs, the voters must be able to have opinions on the matter and identify the differences among the aspirants which will influence their decisions. In some cases, there will be voters whose viewpoints will be too volatile to be used as a point of reference when comparing the aspirants. Also, others will fail to see a substantial difference between their opinions on public policy beliefs and identification of the differences among aspirants. The other voters will have strong views and clear understandings of the differences in aspirants as they directly state their differences. Whether voters have a given aspirants or policy choice does not matter on the choice made by voters, instead, it is the level of differentiation made between aspirants on policy issues, and the basis on which they choose to vote a particular aspirants (Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, ICPSR 2023)^[41].

The physical attributes of political candidates have to have a gendered influence on voter bias. Research discovered that, men tend to vote for attractive female aspirants whilst women tend to vote attractive male aspirants. This observation demonstrated the various yardstick that women have to meet in contract to enable aspirants to be taken seriously as candidates in political contests (Chiao, Bowman and Gill (2008)^[27]. Gender of political aspirant alters how the voters evaluate their qualifications in politics. The aspirants have potentials, which voters desire to know, and these are varying depending on the sex. Regarding female aspirants, voters seek more competence related information such as level of education and occupational experience as compared to male aspirants or candidate. Therefore, the data that voters desire regarding aspirants is disclosed in a manner that indirectly affects the voting habits and decision making. This is bias that demonstrates that voters consider

the sex of the aspirants in an attempt to make assumptions concerning the political aspects that are comparatively closer to their own. It is the natural instinct of several female voters to believe that women will relate and feel their values (Ditonto *et al*, 2013; Teele *et al*, 2018^[30, 55] and McGrath, 2023). Evidence also shows that political participation by means of voting is aroused by the presence of a female aspirant. The very existence of a female aspirant has been identified to raise the turn-out rate of women voters. The descriptive portrayal of women in campaigns has the effect of influencing the general political attitude or politics of women. (Atkeson, 2003)^[12]

Differences in political participation are constituents of gender differences in voting choice. Political engagement can be defined as the modes of personal participation in political actions and it may be subdivided into conventional political engagement and unconventional political engagement, some of the conventional approaches to political practices are voting, writing letters, and signing petitions. Aggressive activities that are considered unconventional are the involvement in peaceful and violent demonstration, strikes, and picketing (CSULB, 2023). A number of studies have indicated that women would tend to practice political engagement. This implies that women are likely to take up the practice of collective voting. Women who have access to educational resources, who can live in societies that support egalitarian values and practices are more prone to getting into politics, compared to women who do not have access to education. Also, women who inhabit societies whose norms and practices are more essential in nature are characterised as essentially feminine and fundamentally unlike men (O'Brien, Reyes-Householder, 2020^[48] and Centre for African Women and Politics, CAWP, 2023)^[26]. The present research examined the way voters in Ekiti state of Nigeria choose aspirants into elective political positions.

Theoretical Orientation

Rational choice modelling refers to the application of the decision theory or rational choice theory as the standards by which the economic and social activity is perceived (Anand, 1993; Abella; 2008)^[1, 9] and Alingham; 2002). Cornish and Clark were the founders of this theory (Becker, 1968)^[17]. It attempts to forecast or estimate the mathematical model of human behaviour by examining the behaviour of a rational player who encounters identical expenses, advantages or profits (Amadae, 2003 & Arrow, 1987)^[6, 11]. Rational choice theory has many applications in the cognitive science, politics and sociology (Bicchier, 1993 & Bicchier, 2003)^[12]. The main position of the rational theory is that the choice of an actor will bring an aggregate of social behaviour. This theory also presupposes that people possess preferences or out of options have selectable options. The decisions appeared to be complete and transitive and this implies that a person can indicate what choice is preferred. This entails people choosing option A as compared to B; B as compared to A or C or a person is not concerned about the choices. The rational agent will then do a cost and benefit analysis by himself with the help of various criteria to carry out their own-preferred best action. Bourdieu (2005)^[21] states that the rational choice theory does not purport to describe the process of making a choice, but can be used to predict the result and trend of a choice. It provides that the person is an egoistic one. The person then

makes a decision whereby the preferences are optimised with some cost and balances. It does not make much sense of traditional perception of democracy as the voice of the people without rationality of voters.

The rational choice has the far reaching effects on political science study particularly in the study of interest groups, elections, and behaviours among political actors (Elster, 1979) ^[34]. Rational theory is endowed with voter's change of behaviour in the most significant way, especially in times of economic distress. Downs and Fernandez-Hunerga (2008) ^[35] explain that a high income voter will vote to whichever party he feels would offer him/her the greatest utility income of government action by use of the rational choice theory to justify why he/she prefers his/her aspirants.

When it comes to the decision of the political aspirants made by the individual voter, the rational choice theory implies that the agent will choose the action (or outcome) that they would most prefer. Assuming the rational individual evaluates actions (or outcomes) in terms of costs and benefits, the rational individual will choose the one with minimum benefits as a decision. Monetary gain is not the only rational behaviour, and may be motivated by emotions, as well. The aspect of rational decision making in politics in general, involves making a choice among all the available option of the aspirants, which the individual voter regards as the best.

Statement of the Problem

Voter's choice of aspirants is one of the most significant problems in politics in Nigeria in general and Ekiti State in particular. The Nigerian electoral system appeared to have several challenges such as electoral malpractice, lack of transparency, disconnect between voters and political aspirants. Vital issues in Ekiti State electoral system was that voters' choices or decisions are often propelled by factors that may not necessary prioritize the needs of the electorate in the State and the nation at large. Despite the importance of the observed role that voters play in shaping States and national leadership, there is limited understanding of the electoral processes.

Another observed problem of voters' choice lies in the fact that voters selection of aspirants are influenced by several factors which include socio-economic considerations, cultural and ethnic identities, party loyalty, and other characteristics. According to the University of Chicago Booth Business School (2023) ^[59], these factors usually intersect and interact in complex ways. This makes it difficult to pinpoint the exact rationale behind voters' choices or decisions. This becomes even more important as it could assist to identify potential vulnerabilities in the electoral system and lead to strategies to promote more transparent, accountable and inclusive elections in Ekiti State and Nigeria (Jenloe & Huettel, 2016; CAWP, 2023 ^[33, 44] and University of Chicago Booth Business School, 2023) ^[59]. Voters' attitudes include things like party affiliation, ideological inclination, level of contentment with the current government, knowledge of public policy, and opinions regarding the personal qualities of a candidate or aspirant. Voting behavior and social identity are predicted by an individual's level of political party identification.

There were cases of election violence and even death. There were issues of insufficient permanent voters' cards while some voters' card was reported stolen. There were cases of

violence; moral questions of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) that conducts election in Nigeria and their inability to technically embrace the new technology advocated for and introduce the smartcard reader (Jayum & Durotoye, 2014) ^[31]. According to the Nigerian Tribune (2014) ^[31], INEC chairman was accused of Nepotism against the interest of the southern regions when the chairman put major number of additional polling booths in the north. INEC mandated the use of smartcard readers for the electronic voter authenticating system and this was used for the 2015 general elections, for the first time in Nigerian elections. A very secure cryptographic technology gadget is used by the card reader. In order to combat election fraud, which is prevalent in Nigeria's voting process, smartcard readers were used. Osinakachukwu (2011) ^[43] lists a number of issues that have plagued the Nigerian election for years, including underage voting, illegal production of voter cards, illegal possession of ballot boxes, stuffing of ballot boxes and manipulation of election results. There was also illegal thumb-printing of ballot papers, generation of false names on voter lists, illegal compilation of separate lists, unlawful printing of election results collection and announcement forms. Furthermore, there was purposeful denial of election supplies to specific regions; announcement of results in locations where no elections were conducted; unapproved release of election results; intimidation of candidates and their representatives. Other problems included alteration of the electoral officials' list; box-switching and inflating of election results. These above challenges affect all stages of federal and states elections in Nigeria. However, this study therefore investigates the rationale behind voters' choice of aspirants in Ekiti State. It examines the complex interplay of factors that shape voters' decisions and shedding light on the implications of these choices for the democratic development and improvement for Ekiti State. By investigating the factors that influence voters' choice of aspirants, this study intends to contribute to a more understanding of the electoral process and inform efforts to promote higher credible, transparent, gender friendly and effective governance in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

To guide the study, the following research questions were generated.

1. What are the political affiliations of voters during elections in Ekiti state?
2. What is the level of party members' involvement in political campaigns in Ekiti state?
3. What is the rationale behind voters' choice of political aspirants and parties in Ekiti state?
4. How does the sex of aspirants affect voters' choice of voting during elections in Ekiti state?

Objective of the Study

The main objective of the study is to investigate the rationale behind voters' choice of political aspirants in Ekiti State. Specific objectives of the study are to:

1. identify the political affiliations of voters during elections in Ekiti state;
2. examine the level of party members' involvement in political campaigns in Ekiti State;
3. identify the rationale behind voters' choice of political aspirants and parties in Ekiti State; and
4. investigate how the sex of aspirants affect voters' choice of voting during elections in Ekiti State.

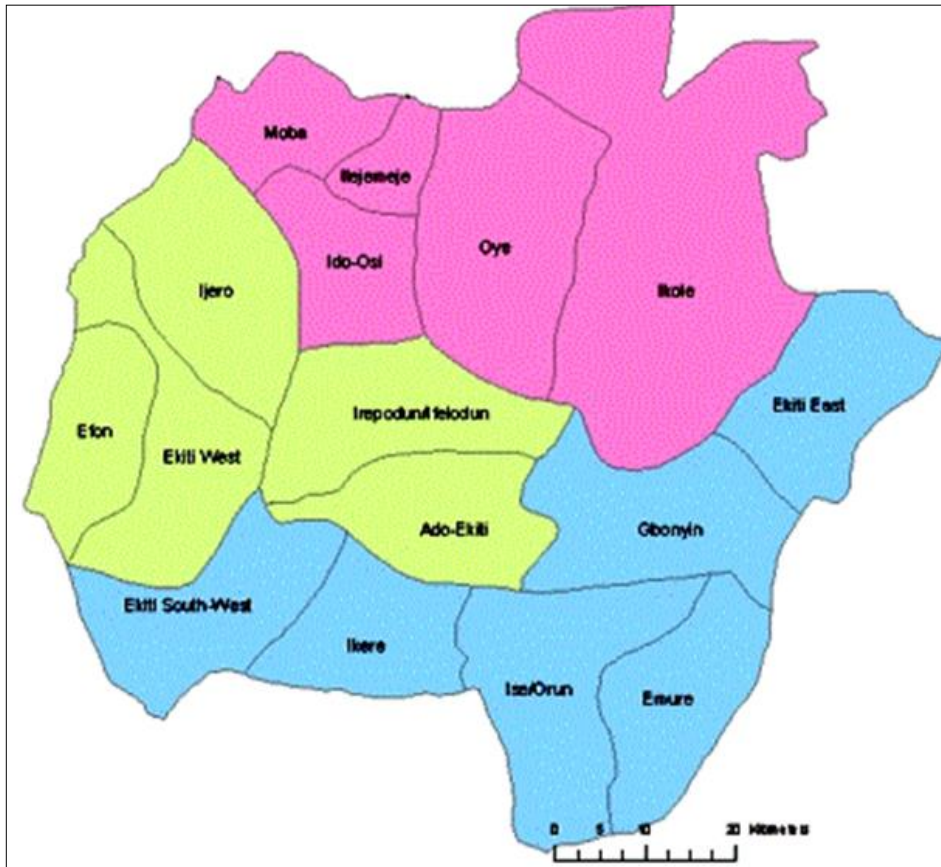
Research Method

The study used a mixed-methods strategy to collect both quantitative and qualitative data utilizing a cross-sectional descriptive survey research design. In order to describe the research aims, the researcher employed questionnaires that use quantitative data. Key informant interview guides (KIIG) were also used to gather qualitative data. To guarantee that pertinent and trustworthy data were collected and utilized for the research project, two instruments are employed. For secondary data, the study also reviewed a number of sources, including pertinent textbooks, journal articles, conference proceedings, and newspaper articles about voters' selection of candidates for political office.

Study Area

Ekiti State, Nigeria was purposively chosen as the study area for this study. Ekiti State consists of three (3) senatorial district namely, Ekiti North, Central and South. The state covers 5,782km² in area with an estimated population of about 3,592,200 million people (National Population Commission of Nigeria and National Bureau of Statistics webs, 2022). Ekiti state was created on 1st October, 1966. The population for the study comprised all eligible male and female voters in Ekiti State.

Map of Ekiti State



Source: Ekiti State Ministry of Lands and Housing

Sample and Sampling Technique

A total sample of 300 respondents was selected for the study from the three (3) senatorial Districts using the multi-stage probability sampling technique. At the first stage, two (2) Local Governments were selected from each of the 3 Senatorial Districts to make 6 Local Governments in all. At the second stage, two (2) towns were selected from the 6 Local Governments to make a total of 12 towns. At the third stage, 25 respondents were selected from each of the 12 towns to make a total of 300 male and female respondents. For the qualitative data, 30 key informants comprising male and female voters were randomly selected for the study from the three (3) Senatorial Districts in the State.

Method of Data Collection

Questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data. The questionnaire was drafted to explain the objectives of the study. On the other hand, key informants interview guide was employed to get in-depth information on the rationale

behind voters' choice of aspirants during elections for political positions in Ekiti State.

Research Instruments

The study employed the use of structured questionnaires with close-ended questions as instruments of data collection. The questionnaire is divided into five (5) sections A to E. Section A sourced information on respondents' socio-economic characteristics such as local government area, town, sex, age, occupation and marital status. Section B consisted of information on political affiliation of voters while section C contained items on political campaigns. Section D obtained information on voters' choice of candidates or political aspirants while section E sourced information on gender and voters' choice of aspirants. The qualitative data collection instrument was a key informant interview guide that contained open-ended questions in line with the objectives of the study. The questions served as guides for probing the key informants during the interview to obtain key detailed information from the respondents.

Validity of Research Instrument

The two data collection instruments were designed and the test carried out on the instrument to check face and content validity to ascertain to what degree the instrument measure the characteristics of interest. This involved putting both instruments through the scrutiny of experts. Suggested corrections were made to enable the instruments to make them better instruments.

Reliability of Instrument

The quantitative research tool was put to test to determine its coefficient and reliability by using SPSS with a pilot test based on Cronbach, Alpha formula. The instrument passed the test of reliability of 0.90 coefficients. The value of this coefficient was deemed to be high enough that the instruments could be used to consistently and reliably measure the aspects of the research that were sought and therefore it was able to offer some degree of confidence in the validity of the data gathered. Such a strong reliability coefficient increased the overall credibility and the trustworthiness of the research results and made sure that the questionnaire for the study captures the subtleties of the phenomena being studied.

Ethical Consideration

The method of conducting the research was in a way in which ethical guidelines were put into careful consideration when involving people in the process of data collection. The rights of the person were given first priority throughout the study. Prior to the start of administration of the two instruments of both quantitative and qualitative instruments, informed and explicit consent was gotten through written consent of all the respondents and people who were interviewed.

Method of Data Analysis

The questions of the questionnaire were analysed using the simple frequencies, percentages and statistical tables, as the quantitative data. The descriptive statistics was embraced to define every variable of the study. The data obtained by the key informant interview, which were the qualitative information, were analysed by the use of thematic and content analysis.

Results

Table 1: Socio-economic characteristics of the Study Participants

Demographic Variables	Groupings	Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Male	148	49.3
	Female	152	50.7
Age	18-22 years	54	18.0
	23-27 years	76	25.3
	28-32 years	107	35.7
	33-37 years	42	14.0
	38-42 years	21	7.0
Occupational status	Government employee	35	11.7
	Private sector employee	69	23.0
	Self-employed	129	43.0
	House Wife	21	7.0
	Unemployed	46	15.3
If self-employed, mode of occupation.	Okada rider	7	5.4
	Business	81	62.8
	Trader	21	16.3
	Tailoring	7	5.4
	Caterer	6	4.7
	Bricklayer	7	5.4
Marital status	Single	170	56.7
	Married	123	41.0
	Divorced	7	2.3

The socio-economic characteristics of the of the study participants is presented in Table 1. The result showed that more than half (50.7%) of respondents were female while 49.3% were male. The highest percentage (38.3%) of the respondents were aged 28-32 years, followed by those between 23-27 years with 25.3%, while the least (7%) were with ages 38-42 years. Distribution of the respondents based on their marital status indicated that majority (56.7%) of the respondents were single, closely followed by married (41%) while the remaining 2.3% represented the divorced. The study also revealed that majority of the respondents (43%) were self-employed followed by private sector employee with 23%, unemployed and government employees represented 15.3% and 11.7% respectively while housewife were the least (7%). Furthermore, majority (62.8%) of the self-employed were business-owners while the least (4.7%) were caterers.

The political affiliations of voters during election are presented in Table 2. The result showed that more than one-third (40.7%) of the study were card carrying members of political parties. Majority (64.8%) of the card carrying members belonged to People’s Democratic Party (PDP) while 35.2% respondents were members of All Progressive Congress (APC). Only 13% of the sample had ever vied for political office, out of which vast majority contested for governorship position, closely followed by President, Commissioner and Member representing 23.1% each while 5.1% vied for the post of Public Relation Officer (PRO). About 28% of the respondents were interested in political posts. Majority of them (33.7%) had presidential ambition, followed by senator and state governor (20.9%) and commissioner (12.8%) while local government chairman (11.6%) was the least in the ranking order.

Table 2: Political Affiliation of Voters during Election in Ekiti State

S/N	Items	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
1	Are you a party card carrying member?	Yes	122	40.7
		No	178	59.3
2	If yes, what is the name of your party?	All Progressive Congress (APC)	43	35.2
		Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)	79	64.8
3	Have you ever vied for political office?	Yes	39	13.0
		No	261	87.0
4	If yes, whatpost?	Public Relation Officer (PRO)	2	5.1
		Member	9	23.1
		Governor	10	25.6
		President	9	23.1
		Commissioner	9	23.1
5	Are you interested in any political post?	Yes	86	28.7
		No	214	71.3
6	If yes what position	President	29	33.7
		Senator	18	20.9
		Commissioner	11	12.8
		Local Government Chairman	10	11.6
		State Governor	18	20.9

Table 3: Level of Party members' Involvement in Political Campaigns

S/N	Items	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
1	Did you campaign for politicians during electioneering process	Yes	108	36.0
		No	192	64.0
2	If yes what party or candidate did you campaign for	All Progressive Congress (APC)	33	30.6
		Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)	75	69.4
3	Did the party or candidate win the elections?	Yes	158	52.7
		No	142	47.3
4	Why did you campaign for them?	Because i believe in their manifesto	7	6.5
		Continuity of work and increased federal allocation	14	13.0
		For improvement and changes in the state	35	32.4
		Because they have visions and good programme for the communities	7	6.5
		For change of government and party interest	13	12.0
		They have good vision and masses in mind	26	24.1
		Because I like and prefer them	6	5.6
5	Did you vote during the last voting exercise in Nigeria	Yes	190	63.3
		No	110	36.7
6	If yes which party or individual did you vote for	APC	48	25.3
		PDP	142	74.7
7	Some reasons why you voted for the candidates or parties of your choice?	Money/vote selling and buying	14	4.7
		political clout	33	11.0
		Influence	33	11.0
		A friend of the masses	129	43.0
		Visions, foresights and empowerment programmes	91	30.3

Level of party members' involvement in political campaigns is captured in Table 3. The result indicated that 36% of the study respondents actively campaigned for political parties during electioneering process while 30.6% and 69.4% campaigned for All Progressive Congress (APC) and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) respectively. Majority (52.7%) respondents reported that their party or candidate won the elections while 32.4% campaigned for political candidates during electioneering process based on their expectation for improvement and changes in the state, good

vision and (24.1%) for masses in mind, continuity of work and increased federal allocation (13%) and change of government and party interest (12%). More than half (63.3%) voted during the last voting exercise in Nigeria while majority (74.7%) voted for People's Democratic Party (PDP). Among the reasons adduced for voting for the candidates or parties of their choice were: candidates being a friend of the masses (43%), visions, foresights and programmes (30.3%), political clout and influence (11%) and money / vote selling and buying (4.7%).

Table 4: Rationale behind Voter's Choice of Party/Aspirants

S/N	Items	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Did you vote the candidate/party because:				
1	they will serve your own interest when elected	Yes	62	20.7
		No	238	79.3
2	they are members of your LGA	Yes	35	11.7
		No	265	88.3

3	They are your neighbours	Yes	7	2.3
		No	293	97.7
4	Of the irreligious affiliation	Yes	27	9.0
		No	273	91.0

Rationale behind voter’s choice of party/aspirants is presented in Table 4. The result showed that only (20.7%) of the respondents voted the candidate/party because they will serve their own interest when elected, they are members

of their LGA (11.7%), they are their neighbours (2.3%), of their religious affiliation (9%). However, 79.3% of the respondents voted for candidates and aspirants who have the interest of the masses at heart.

Table 5: Aspirants’ Sex and Voters’ Choice

S/N	Items	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
1	What sex do you prefer as aspirant?	Male	195	65.0
		Female	105	35.0
2	Give reasons for your preference	My choice is one of the best thinkers	86	28.7
		My choice has vision/foresights	71	23.7
		My choice is a political clout	57	19.0
		My choice is more educated	43	14.3
		My choice is a good administrator	29	9.7
		My choice is a friend of the masses	14	4.7

Sex and voters’ choice of aspirants is captured in Table 5. The result showed that majority (65%) of the study participants indicated preference for male aspirants than females. The reasons for their preference were that their choices are best thinkers (28.7%), have vision/foresights (23.7%), are political clouts (19%), are more educated (14.3%), are good administrators (9.7%) are friends of the masses (4.7%).

Key Informants’ Responses

Responding to the questions on political affiliations of voters during elections of aspirants during elections in Ekiti State, 66.67(20) of the 30 key informants said that they were party card carriers while 33.33% (10) were not party card carriers. Majority, 60% (12) party card carriers were Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) members while the remaining 40% (8) were All Progressive Congress (APC) members.

On level of key informants’ involvement in political campaigns, 40% (12) of the 30 key informants said that they campaigned while 60% (18) claimed that they did not campaign. On whom the 18 key informants campaigned for, 44.4% (8) claimed that they campaigned for APC aspirants while majority, 55.6% (10) campaigned for PDP aspirants. When asked if the key informants voted during the last voting exercise in Ekiti State in year 2022 [57], 70% (21) of the 30 key informants said that they voted. Thirty (30%) (9) informants said that they did not vote during the last election. Out of the 21 informants who voted at the election, 35% (7) of them voted for APC aspirants while most of the key informants, 65% (14) voted for aspirants from PDP. Majority, 43.3%(12)key informants said that the reason for voting for aspirants was that they were “friends of the masses”, while the remaining informants voted for aspirants because of the aspirants’ “visions, foresights, empowerment programmes for people”,”political clout”; and “influence of the aspirants on the people” vote buying”.

On the rationale behind voters’ choice of party/aspirants, out of 30 key informants, majority, 90% (27) said that they neither voted for aspirants because the aspirants will serve their personal interests, nor because the aspirants were from their local government areas nor because the aspirants were their neighbours nor because of the aspirants’ religious

affiliations. In other word, 90% of the voters voted for aspirants for good state and national benefits rather than personal or selfish reasons. Majority of the informants also indicated that voters’ choices are influenced by a complex interplay between circumstances, emotional attachments and logical assessments.

On the sex of aspirants and voters’ choice, majority, 65% (19) of the key informants claimed that their preferred aspirants were males while 55% (11) informants preferred to vote for female aspirants during elections. The reasons for their choice of voters in order of preference were that their choice was the best thinkers; had vision/foresights; was a political clout; was more educated; was a good administrator; and was a friend of the masses.

Discussion of Findings

The study discovered that one-third of the respondents were card carrying members of political parties. Majority of the card carrying members belonged to People’s Democratic Party (PDP) while some were members of All Progressive Congress (APC). This finding concurs with (The Cable, 2019 &This Day, 2022) [56, 57].

The study showed that majority of the respondents had presidential ambition, followed by senators and state governor and local government chairmen. This finding agrees with (Daily Trust, 2022; Egbejule *et al*, 2023; IFES, 2022) [29, 33].

The study revealed that the respondents actively campaigned for aspirants during electioneering process. A few of the respondents campaigned for All Progressive Congress (APC) while majority of them campaigned for Peoples Democratic Party (PDP).This study agrees with Bratton *et al* (2012) [22].The study indicated that majority of the respondents claimed that their party or candidate won the elections.

The study showed that many respondents campaigned for political aspirants during electioneering process based on their expectation for improvement and changes in Ekiti State, good vision and having the masses in mind. Some of them voted for aspirants because of continuity of work and increased federal allocation. This finding agrees with Caplan (2007); Healy, Malhotra &Mo (2010) & Beck (2002) [16, 25, 39]. A few of them voted for change of

government and party interest. The study showed that more than half of the respondents voted during the last voting exercise (2022/2023) ^[41, 57] in Ekiti State/Nigeria. Majority voted for People's Democratic Party (PDP).

The study discovered that the reasons for voting for the candidates or parties of their choice in order of preference were candidates being a friend of the masses; visions, foresights and programmes; political clout and influence and lastly, vote-buying. This finding agrees with the discovery of Alesina & Edwards (2004) and Palfrey & Poole (1987) ^[50] and disagrees with the findings of Bergman (2020) and Junn & Masuoka (2020) ^[46].

The study revealed that voters voted for candidate/party because they believed that such candidates of their choice will serve the interest of the masses when elected, others claimed that they voted because the aspirants were members of their Local Government Areas (LGA); followed by the fact that such candidates were their neighbours; and a few voted because of aspirants' religious affiliation. This finding agrees with Bartels (Bartels, 2000).

The study also revealed that majority of the key informants interviewed said that voters' choices are influenced by a complex interplay between circumstances, emotional attachments and logical assessments. This agrees with the finding of Amao & Alliu (2024).

The study showed that on the gender and voters' choice of aspirants, respondents' preference for male aspirants was higher than for females. This finding agrees with the findings of Teele, Kalla & Rosenbluth (2018) and (ICPSR, 2023) ^[55, 59], but disagrees with Atkeson (2003); Ditonto *et al* (2013) ^[12, 30] & McGrath (2023). The study also found out that the reasons for their preference for male aspirants were that men are the best thinkers; have vision/foresights; are political clouts; more educated; good administrators; and friends of the masses. This finding agrees with (Andreadis & Chadjipedelis, 2006) ^[10] and ICPSR (2023), but disagrees with O'Brien & Reyes-Householder (2020) ^[48] & CAWP (2023).

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made.

1. More party carrying members should be involved in campaigning for their party aspirants to enable voters to be acquainted with the qualities and talents of the aspirants in all parties which would help voters to choose the best and masses focused aspirants who would improve the living standard of the people in their constituency and Ekiti State.
2. Voters should choose candidates or aspirants who are seen to be friends of the masses, are visionaries, have foresights, are political clout and have lots of empowerment programmes for Ekiti people.
3. Voters should always vote for aspirants who will serve the interest of the masses and the under-privileged or have welfare of the needy at heart.
4. Voters should not entertain vote-buying during elections.
5. Voters should vote more for women during elections to enhance political inclusion because women are also educated, good thinkers, have good visions and foresights, are better administrators, are political clouts, are friends of the masses.

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