Factors Affecting Voting Behavior among Youth in Luapula Province, Zambia

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to investigate the youth voting behavior considering how cultural factors, ethnicity, intergenerational factors, political ideologies and legal literacy determined voting behavior of the youth.

Methodology: A Questionnaire was used to collect quantitative and qualitative data by including closed and open-ended questions. The quantitative data collected was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) while the qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings were presented in form of tables, percentages and bar charts.

Results: The findings revealed that the youth were to an extent influenced by culture in their voting patterns. The patriarchal nature of the communities in the country determined voting behavior in that mostly men were voted in.

Conclusion: The study concluded that the level of literacy influenced voting behavior whereby, those in leadership and literate had a great influence on the choices made by the less literate.

Recommendation: The study recommends increased dialogue and leadership training programs for the youth. Efforts to reclaim credibility of the electoral system and process should be made by the government through proper implementation of laws and civic education.

Keywords: Cultural factor, ethnicity, legal literacy, policies, voting, youth, law and civic education.
1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

As at 2015, the world’s population stood at 7 billion people with the figure expected to balloon to nearly 8 billion in 2018. Of this population 14% consist of the youth (FAO, 2015). The population of the youth in Zambia is among the highest in the world (Business Daily, 2017). This continued growth in population of the youth has led to several challenges of limited opportunities for employment, poor pay and limited entrepreneurial ventures (FAO, 2014). In Zambia, the demographics are no exception, the youth constitute the largest proportion of the population. They however tend to be marginalized and underrepresented in leadership spheres (Mutuku, 2009).

There are various definition of the composition and age bracket that constitute the youth (The Youth Congress 2015). In Zambia, Article 260 of Zambia’s Constitution the youth who are between the age of 18 and 34 (Constitution of Zambia, 2010) constitute the largest sector of Zambia’s population as per the 2009 country census. The youth consisted of 36.2% of the total population (United Nations Populations UNFPA, 2013). With this majority however, their representation in the formal institutions of the government, the state as well as the newly devolved units within the counties is minimal. So is their involvement in political parties and thus the need to empower them for better involvement as opposed to using them as just a means to an end every five year that the electoral cycle comes through. With their increased involvement in the process, it would be expected that they would positively impact the government and governance in the country.

Moreover, the youth are rarely actively involved in active politics nor do they have permanent party standings. While the levels of civil engagements such as civil education could be attributed to the low participation, more on the same needs to be investigated. The strength and modes of participation are pertinent variables in political scrutiny (Robertson, 2009). Humans’ voting conduct is an essential feature and a gateway of understanding the willingness of respondents. In democratic and egalitarian societies, voting is a significant instrument providing opportunities to the respondents to become vibrant citizens instead of inactive subjects. To recognize on what grounds one candidate wins or loses an election; can only be understood by identifying voting behavior. Sociologists have long focused on the affiliation of individuals with their own ethnic group, social background as the key determinants of voting behavior while political scientist in the past have argued on the influence of party membership and voting conduct.

Eldersveld (1951) in his article “Theory and Method in Voting Behavior Research” define the term “voting behavior” as an area of study that scrutinizes the political phenomena that has been ignored for quite some time. While it investigates records and statistics of votes, it also considers the computation of electoral swings and shifts. Moreover, it considers the analysis of the individual voter’s psychological process which relates to the emotions, motivation and perceptions of the voters. All this is related to the political actions, institutional patterns and the impact on election and the process of communication. On their part Biea and Bratucu (2016) describe voting behavior as a study field that is concerned with how people vote in a public election and the reasoning behind this. This part of the definition has been expanded to look into the human political behavior while in the context of public electoral voting. The study seeks to examine the human mind in
relation to the political process of voting and thus constitute an integral part of political science theory which political scientist seek to qualitatively and systematically test and measure.

Several factors on voting behavior have been highly researched on. The youth have been found to vote along the same lines as their parents as Rundio (2008) concluded, parental political influence is high on the youth with them voting on the same line as their parents. In this case, if the parents are American Republicans, their children are more likely to vote on the same line. This thus tunes to the direction of party affiliations as some of the strong factors that could be guiding the voting behavior of the youth only that it is highly influenced by the parents’ party affiliations. Bennett (1997) associated the voting behaviors of the youth to the low trust levels that the United States youths have on the politicians. This thus calls for the politicians’ direct appeal to the youth to increase their likelihood of getting votes from the youth. This led to candidates having to struggle to directly appeal to potential youth voters, as was the case with former President Bill Clinton, who appeared on a television show in an effort to appeal to the young voters (Ifill, 1992).

Sherrod (2003) also noted that the involvement of the youth in civic affairs is more likely to influence the youth’s involvement in the electoral process. This is more so when the youth become involved in civic engagements while at a lower age, grooming them to become civically active adults. While this may start from the lower ages such as during the high school age, there is no assurance that the same will continue with time to their adulthood. This balancing act becomes delicate as even the previous studies have not identified a clear line of what exactly affects the youth engagement in the electoral process or one that could explain their voting behavior. Universal suffrage which entails the ability of all eligible adults to vote has also contributed significantly to shaping voting behavior in the world and in Africa. The fact that voting was only allowed based on particular social aspects per region has influenced voting conduct. There was a time when only affluent males could vote. This later moved to include other males but not females. Eventually, women acquired the rights to vote although there are places where this is yet to be fully functional (Miller, 2008).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

While studies have shown the role of the youth as a dynamic portion of the Zambian population, there are several challenges that could be hindering them to be actively involved in political participation and the building of democracy in Zambia (Njongio, 2010). The Zambia youth policy is reviewed every now and then. The government sought to address the issues that affected the youth in Zambia. The progress on the achievements of the same have been slow and focused more towards social economic activities. Representation of the youth in parliament and sound engagement in civic activities had not been consistent and progressive despite the numbers they command (Republic of Zambia, 2006). There has been significant effort on the part of the government to address challenges faced by the youth by use of the youth policy and building up on it through the creation of the National youth council and further, the youth strategic plan 2007-2012. The consistent allocation of development funds to the youth and lack of equal change among the youth could be addressed in a multi-faceted approach including civic involvement and empowerment which was not well addressed. The study on how the youths vote has been a point interest for political scientists as notes Armstrong (2008). On his side, Bennett, (1997) felt that the youth were left out in politics and less engaged. He noted that in 1972 in the United States, the youths who had just attained the legal voting age of 18 were expected to show up in large numbers
and vote in the elections. They were expected to have been affected by the policies in place especially the Vietnam war which would push them to change the existing policies. They however, to the surprise of many scientists, showed up the lowest turnout. This brought out the idea of disinterest in politics among the youths and the generation.

1.3 General Objective

The general objective of the study was to investigate the factors affecting voting behavior among the youth in Zambia.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

1. To examine how cultural factors, determine voting behavior among youth in Luapula Province.
2. To establish how ethnicity, determine voting behavior among the youth in Luapula Province.
3. To establish how intergenerational factors, determine voting behavior among the youth in Luapula Province.
4. To establish how political ideologies, determine voting behavior among the youth in Luapula Province.
5. To examine how legal literacy, determine voting behavior among the youth in Luapula Province.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Economic Theory of Democracy

This economic theory received enough empirical support from the ideology that voter reward the incumbent for good times and punish them with the votes for negative times. Here the vote comes in as a reward for their past performance. Their expectations of the future thus guide the individual’s voting behavior. Lewis-Beck, Nadeau & Foucault (2012) notes that this theory is based on the classic reward-punishment model thus treating the economy as the valence issue. However, the theory has its own shortcoming with possibilities of there are three claims that have been leveled against it and which include instability, endogeneity and unidimensional nature of the theory. The first claim argues that the magnitude of the economic voting coefficient varies greatly across time, place and context, implying it has no fundamental existence. The second claim argues that the economic voting coefficient finds its source in partisan bias, having no independent existence of its own. The third claim, a new one, argues that economic voting theory has narrowly restricted its attention to valence issues, thereby excluding the important dimensions of policy position and patrimony.

2.1.2 Sociological Model Theory on Voting

The assumptions of the sociological model of voting behavior are defined in three essential works: The People’s Choice (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944), Voting (Berelson, Lazarsfeld & McPhee, 1954) and Personal Influence (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). Lazarsfeld group hypothesized that the act of voting is an individual act, affected mainly by the personality of the voter and his or her exposure to the media. The results of their research, however, contradicted this hypothesis to
the extent that it revealed that voting was more affected by the social group the voter belonged to than media exposure (Bartels, 2008). The association between social groups of a voter and his or her voting decision was so strong that they concluded that voting behavior could easily be explained using three factors, namely; religion, region and socioeconomic status (Eldersveld, 1951).

2.1.3 Altruism Theory of Voting

The altruism theory of voting model states that potential voter is motivated by weak altruism on their decision to vote in an election or abstain. Jankowski (2007) brought out this rather new theory with an effort to explain the seemingly irrational voting behavior. The theory explains that it is irrational for voters to vote or even be informed about politics. The author bases the reasoning on Myerson, (2000) that low voter turnout is only possible when the voters are driven by self-interest. On his explanation, the author notes that the weight of the self-interest while voting is overridden by the overall good of the society done by voting. In a direct comparison, Jankowski, (2002) compared voting to purchasing a lottery ticket which has very low chances of winning but one which promises to help the less fortunate. The possible high win and the help of the less privileged pushes one to purchase a lottery ticket.

2.2 Empirical Review

Hazarika (2015) explains that “voting” is a term used in contemporary democratic politics and this practice has had increasing popularity in democratic theory and practice to become a household name. This he explains has become the way through which adult citizens are able to express their approval or otherwise of the government’s decision, programs and policies. Through this process also various individuals seek to obtain the status of being representatives of the people. On the other hand, Malkopoulou (2016) explain that through voting, individual citizens make a choice of government and its policies, developing or maintaining allegiance or disaffection to a constitutional regime, expresses their emotions and to some people it’s either emotionally or politically insignificant. Voting behavior is studied as a whole looking at the electoral behavior with the aim of understanding and trying to explain why individuals and public decision makers behave the way they do while exercising their voting right and responsibility. This is a key area of concern for the electorate, political scientists as well as the other stakeholders in the electoral process. Voting behavior is studied from both the political science as well as the human psychology point of view which has brought up the idea of political psychology in an attempt to understand these political behaviors (Cottam, 2010).

Muna, Stanton and Mwau (2014) notes that for a long-time politics and political leadership have been left for the older generation. Most of the political leaders in the continent have been reasonably old with the continent being home to some of the eldest and longest serving president in the world. The issue of kingship and social structures were identified by Whyte, Alber & Van der Geest (2008) as some of the defining elements of economic, social and even political realities in the continent. There has however been effort to have the young generations take up leadership role in the country and Zambia has been no exception. Children are known to take after their parents on several aspects and their political attitudes and behaviors are no exceptions. Studies have shown parent-offspring’s correlations on their political orientation as well as the party identification and association (Jennings, Stoker & Bowers, 2009; Plutzer, 2002; Jennings et al.,
2009) were also able to relate and report significant intergenerational transmission of political participation as well as voter turnout while undertaking their studies. There have been several interesting studies which have tried to understand the human behavior relating to voting and the intergenerational characteristics of individuals. There have been two explanations relating to the transmission of the human characteristics.

Bratton & Kimenyi (2008) explained the “ethnic census” in relation to elections as one where racial, tribal and linguistic solidarities are so strong that one can use them to predict the voting behavior by just the headcount of the identity groups. This is the effect that ethnicity has on the voting behavior of ethnic groups. Chandra (2003) notes that in India the ethnic group size that a party, politician or an individual patronizes can be used a means to determine the popularity of the individual or party. This is no different even in the developed countries such as the United States where race is a key determinant of the political following and the voting behavior. Bratton et al., (2008) note that this factor extends in almost all world regions with African countries having no exception. Identity voting is exercised with the strongest pillar in most African countries being ethnicity. A reason that has made most of the minority ethnic group have little or no chance on the electoral leadership.

Political parties make up the main intermediary institutional structure between the individual and the government in a democracy (Checkel, 2005). A political party is an institution with set rules, standards, and norms which are well set out and are generally accepted by the party members with the intention of restricting the individual interest for the sake of maximizing the overall good of the group (Haan, 2007). For a stable democracy, it is important to have major parties that have strong bases and support among the voters. This helps such parties have strong policies and outlive their leaders. Its such strong basis that has seen the Republican party in the US outlive the depression years in the 1970s together with the Watergate scandal. Strong loyalties make parties exist when they are not based on factors beyond personal, ethnic-regional, religious or institutional imperatives (Osaghae, 2004)

Political parties have evolved over time. The initial political parties were rooted in civil society organizations and trade unions, church organizations, labor organizations as well as the law society (Van de Walle, 2003). This has however changed with time to a period when ideas and common interest are the main drivers of these political parties. With time, however, this has evolved to ethnic-regional politically motivated with other groups. These political parties and especially in Zambia are highly ethically based as with time there have been difficulties, groups, trusting individual from a different ethnic background, perhaps driven by the number of Memorandum of Understanding that has been broken after the formation of political parties and their ascent or failure to ascend to power (Kagwanja, 2009).

3.0 Methodology

The researcher adopted the descriptive research design since it allowed the researcher to describe the population of interest. This research targeted the youth voters in Luapula Province. To carry out the research, one would have been required to visit the whole province obtaining data from the various corners of the province. The data collected is checked for consistency and then analyzed with the help of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis. Descriptive statistics
such as mean and standard deviations are the descriptive techniques that were used in this study. The findings of the study were presented in form of graphs, tables, percentages and bar charts.

4.0 Data Analysis, Findings and Discussion

4.1 Demographic Characteristics

During the study, the researcher gathered data from 100 respondents. Out of the 100 questionnaires that were issued during the study 10 were not filled completely by the time the researcher collected the questionnaires from the respondents. From the study findings a majority of the respondents (57.8%) were male while the female population in the study amounted to 42.2%. In addition, the researcher sampled from a population of young people between the ages of 18 and 34 years. There were no major differences between the various age groups although most of the participants were between the ages of 18 and 25 years. According to the study findings majority (37.8%) of the respondents had acquired a diploma. Participants with a post-graduate degree had the highest academic level attained.

4.2 Descriptive Analysis

4.2.1 Effect of Culture on Voting Behavior

During the study, the researcher identified various cultural factors that influenced voting behavior among young people in Luapula Province. According to the study findings, majority of the respondents indicated that literacy and the overall community literacy average significantly influenced the voter behavior. In addition, majority of the respondents stated that income had a significant impact on the voting behavior. These two factors are closely linked since poverty takes a toll on access and equity in education (Haruna, 2009). As such, poor people are less likely to access formal education which impacts their political intelligence. People with low levels of literacy are less likely to criticize the opinions of politicians which predisposes them to undue influence. Gender was also a significant determinant of voting behavior. Given that most communities in Luapula Province are patriarchal, women have limited control on decision making processes in the community. This means that major decisions including which candidates are most viable are made by men. The fact that women do not play a major role in decision making means that they are likely to follow decisions made by elders regarding elections and suitability of candidates without question. Other factors were also identified as illustrated in figure 1.
Further, the researcher asked the respondents to share their views on whether culture had an impact on voting behavior. A majority of the respondents stated that truly, the culture of the people living in Luapula Province significantly influenced the voting behavior in the region. Figure 2 illustrates the proportions.

**Figure 1: Cultural factors**

**Figure 2: Effect of culture on voting behavior**
4.2.2 Impact of Ethnicity on Voting Behavior

During the study, the researcher also wanted to investigate the impact of ethnicity on voter behavior and decision making. The researcher established a number of variables representing the dynamics of ethnicity when it came to making decisions about political candidates. According to the study findings, the promise to a tribe and the ethnic composition of leadership were identified as the main factors that impacted a voter’s choice during an election. However, a significant number of the participants stated that tribal grouping and clan influence were not a major concern given that Luapula Province has over time become cosmopolitan. Besides, it became evident that the youth were taking a rather different approach towards voting unlike their parents as a result of education and greater exposure to other communities. Figure 3 is an illustration of the study findings on the impact of ethnicity on voting behavior.

![Impact of ethnicity on voting behavior](image)

Figure 3: Impact of ethnicity on voting behavior

4.2.3 Impact of Intergenerational Factors on Voting Behavior

During the study the researcher wanted to find out how intergenerational factors affected voting behavior of residents of Luapula Province. The researcher explored a set of variables with the aim of shedding light to the topic. During the study, the researcher wanted to find out if the respondents supported generational change in the leadership of Luapula Province. Majority of the respondents (51 of 90) stated that they supported generational change in the province. Even so, there was consensus in the number of respondents that believed that certain generational factors did not impact their voting behavior. According to the study results, many of the respondents did not agree to being influenced by parents’ voting decisions (38 of 90), following the family opinion when choosing among candidate (38 in 90), considering the leader’s family history (29 of 90) and existence of homogeneity in the family opinions regarding electoral decisions. A number of the respondents cited the lack of youth mentorship (28 in 90) and the lack of generational change (24
in 90) amongst the leaders in Luapula Province. Figure 4 is an illustration of the participants’ opinions regarding how the identified generational factors impacted voting behavior within Luapula Province.

![Figure 4: Intergenerational factors](image)

**4.2.4 Impact of Political Ideologies on Voting Behavior**

During the study, the researcher wanted to establish whether political ideologies determined the voting behavior of the youth in Luapula Province. The respondents were asked whether they had any specific political affiliations. Most of the respondents (28), stated that they had specific political party affiliation. In addition, a number of the respondents (27) stated that they followed the campaign strategy of a specific party. Besides, some of the respondents stated that political party manifestos (21) and individual ideologies (33) had a major impact on their voting behavior as illustrated on figure 5.
4.2.5 Impact of Legal Literacy on Voting Behavior

Further, the researcher wanted to find out how legal literacy impacted the voting behavior of participants. First, the researcher wanted to find out how legal literacy affect the voting behavior of respondents. First, the respondents were asked to state whether they understood the electoral law in Zambia. According to the study findings, majority of the researchers indicated that they understood the electoral law in Zambia in general. Many of the respondents indicated that they were aware of the requirements and qualifications of candidates by law. The researcher established that the law was not being applied strictly to ensure smooth engagement in the electoral process. Figure 6 is an illustration of the findings on the impact of legal factors on voting behavior.

Figure 5: Political ideologies

Figure 6: Impact of legal factors on voting behavior
5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The study discovered that the perception that certain people influenced the voting process reduced the willingness of the youth to engage in the electoral process. Various behavior models can be used to explain the lower voter turnout, particularly among youths. The theory of planned behavior and the theory of reasoned action have been used by scholars in the past to explain electoral behavior. This means that the decisions not to engage in elections can often be as a result of the intention to behave a certain way following a series of clear observations and sound reasoning. For instance, having observed misappropriation of authority and disregard for the process among the official’s young people are compelled to disengage from the process since it does not deliver the expected results. Behavioral models explain the voting behaviors of young people regarding their involvement in the voting process and hence are used to predict and navigate the intentions of young people towards active participation. This can be done, by designing the electoral process in a way that involves and benefits the young people which give them better reasons for engaging in the process. For instance, creating a fair and free electoral process would motivate young people to vie and vote for their fellow youth leaders hence increasing the inclusion of young people in the government.

5.2 Recommendations

The researcher recommended a revision of the guiding laws, statutes and conduct of the electoral body. There is a need for the government to invest in reclaiming the image of the electoral body in order to restore confidence among the young voters as well as those of other voters’ groups. Requiring full transparency and instituting consequences against the mismanagement of the authority could facilitate a freer and fairer electoral process in the country.

Provide leadership training programs for primary, secondary and university students as a form of introducing young people into the responsibilities and roles of governance in the country. Understanding the processes of government will ensure a well-informed approach to governance and leadership. This will counter the dependency of those who are limited by poverty to access information since it will be available from an early age. There should be media outreach to inform people on elections, their purpose and the work of government under civic education and encouraged non-partisan participation. Training youths also makes them better voters while reducing the level of influence of local and national leaders on the voting decisions. Law makers should develop favorable nomination requirements to ensure greater inclusivity of young people in the electoral process. Setting high fees limits the involvement of young people majority of whom lack a stable source of funding owing to the high unemployment rates. This way, candidates can compete on the grounds of their vision for the country rather than their wealth and social status. Parties should also have increased responsibility to members in enlightening them on their manifesto and vision so that there can be greater understanding and loyalty.

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Conflict of Interest

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