

Trust in Government: A Note from Nigeria

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Abstract

The relationship between trust in government and factors that accounts for Nigerians citizen trust in their government has been of interest due a dearth of literature on such issue. This study is an attempt to bridge the gap from a public policy perspective. One of the measures usually used in the literature to measure trust or distrust in government is perception of corruption, but there are other yardsticks with which to measure determinant of trust in government, such as economic performance or political participation. This study used a micro-level analysis of public opinion survey data (question by question) to ascertain empirical linkages of political trust within Nigeria. To this end, Afrobarometer survey Round Four conducted in 2008 was used for the analyses. Descriptive statistics provide background information on the sample, while multivariate logistic regression using SPSS were used to model the citizens' trust for government in Nigeria. This study revealed that political trust or trust in governments in Nigeria stems from a number of factors. These are economy performance, media, interest in public affairs, religious membership, political participation, interpersonal trust, lack of basic needs, and management of corruption. Furthermore, the variables that influence trust in government the most are interpersonal trust and government management of corruption issue. Those that reported interpersonal trust also reported that they have trust for the government. While those that believe the governments are fighting or managing corruption nicely have a tendency to trust in the government. Although this study does not claim to provide all the answer on political trust or trust in governments in Nigeria, its attempt is to bridge gap in the literature on the topic and to assist future research in the area, as nothing exist on the topic as the moment. It is hope the subject will forms a basis upon which further analytical work on political trust in Nigeria can be carried out.

Introduction

The decline in trust for government that was witness immediately after 2007 general election in Nigeria, led voters and indeed majority of Nigerians to demand electoral reform. The Nigeria governments in agreement with the call for reform setup the Uwias electoral reform committee. The committee assignments among others, was to recommend policies that will enhance trust in government. The study seeks to model citizens' determinant of political trust in order to provide understanding of the process that lead to trust in government. When

Nigerians were asked by Afrobarometer survey group in 2008, of their political trust, majority of the respondents agreed that they have some form of trust. As a matter of facts, only about 17 percent said they do not have political trust “at all”. (Afrobarometer Survey, 2008).

In the Literatures on trust, factors usually used to measure trust or distrust in government is perception of corruption. Indeed, several studies have documented that corruption is the main determinant of citizen’s distrust in governments (Iroghama, 2005; Transparency International, 2006; Bourne, 2010). Nigeria is not atypical of corruption plaguing its government (Transparency International, 1999 – 2008). Without overemphasizing the debate about corruption, there are other yardsticks with which to measure determinant of trust in government, such as economic performance, misappropriation of public funds, political participation. (Hazan, 2006)

In several studies on Trust, some analyst speaks of organizational trust, while others speak of interpersonal trust. However, my interest is in political trust, a form of organizational trust, which is trust in government-governmental institutions and politicians. In general, Trust can be define as the expectation that arises within a community of regular, honest, and cooperative behavior, base on shared norms, on the part of other members of that community. Political trust is based on an individual’s evaluation of the political sphere. (Bourne, 2010) More generally, trust is the ingredients which wish the citizen evaluate government policies, programs, promises, honesty and justices, as well as politicians. Against this backdrop, the study seeks to understand the factors that accounts for Nigerians citizen trust in their government.

Trust, a catalyst of democratic institutions, lacking can leads to political instability, such as the one experienced in Nigeria before the 4th republic. Understanding political trust in Nigeria is central to understanding perception of current democratic dispensation. Not only understanding perception of current democratic dispensation, it also matter to understand political trust because lack of trust can lead to erosion of public confidence, loss of legitimacy of governments. Consequently, distrust or lack of trust, can pose serious challenge to working of governments. For example, Khan (2007) declares, “Public trust in institutions, especially in government, is [essentials] to achieving the triangle of freedom- stability, peace and development – in each and every nation. Trust enhances confidence in institutions and consequently, attracts cooperation of citizens to the agreed policies and program[s] of the governments.” (p. 13).

The major reason for the present study is to identify and measure the factors that lead to trust in government in Nigeria. To this end, Afrobarometer Round Four survey (2008) is used to examine the relationship between political trust and various confounding factors. Hence based on literature, it is expected that there would be positive association between trust in government and interpersonal trust, along with other confounding factors.

Not much empirical work has been done in this part of the world, and indeed in sub-saharan Africa, on empirical linkages that identify factors that leads to trust, consequently, confidence

in the government of Nigeria. This study is an attempt to bridge this gap and further contribute to theory formation. It is within this framework and its attending effects that are the rational for this study; what factors accounts for Nigeria's citizens' trust for their government? Answering this question would help to identify the factors that forms citizens trust for their governments.

Some studies used a multivariate methodology to model correlates of political trust, others uses case study to identify correlates of political trust. Iroghama (2005) using sample survey data from Afrobarometer survey of 1999, in the study, "Bandits or Rulers? Sources of Perceived Political Corruption in Sub-Saharan Africa", identified "political corruption" as one of the factor that influenced trust for institutions. The study suggested that of the variables or factors that explained perceived corruption is sub-saharan Africa trust in the president correlated strongly with levels of perceived corruption. "In addition those that trust the president are significantly more likely ($p < .05$) to 'disagree' that bribery is not common." (p. 35).

In another study by Bourne et al, (2010) several variable was found to influenced political trust. With a random sample of 1,338 Jamaicans, the study discovered that generalized trust is a function of religiosity, confidence in socio-political institution, justice and sex of the individual. Further investigation found out that "An individual who attends church frequently is ...($p < 0.05$) less likely to trust the government and other persons than someone who has never attended church...." (p. 32). Yet in another study by Bourne, (2010), this time on "Modeling Political Trust in a Developing Country" the study explained that confidence in socio-political institution, perception of justice, governance of the nation, sex of the interviewee, political participation, and interpersonal trust are all statistical significance correlates of political trust.

Sautu and Perugorria (2008), "Political culture in times of crisis: Trust and Performance among Middle Class Residents of Buenos Aires", the authors argues that there is a causal link between trust and performance of Argentina's democracy. Hypothesizing that the higher the level of trust, the higher the level of satisfaction with democracy; the study documented that satisfaction with democracy is correlate of trust. With socio-demographic characteristics as control variables, the authors concluded amongst its findings that "trust is the most important significant explanatory variable of satisfaction [with democracy]." (p. 19).

In attempt to answer the question "Why do Corrupt Government Maintain Public Support?" by Manzetti and Wilson (2007), the authors lamented that people in countries where government institution are weak are more likely to support corrupt leaders. Using a cross-national analysis of citizens in 14 countries, the authors suggested that such trust emanated from patron-client relationship that is endemic in the culture of corrupt society. "As long as corrupt leaders can satisfy their clientelistic networks by manipulation of government resources they are likely to retain political [trust] support." (p. 17).

Catterberg and Moreno (2005), examined individual basis of political trust in society. Distinctive dynamics as a frame were used to determine differences and commonalities both in new and established democracies. From a multivariate analytical point of view, a model was built to

predict political trust. With data from World Value Survey and European Value Survey which were conducted between 1981 and 2000, the authors suggested that irrespective of nations, individual well-being is the most significant predictors of political trust, thereby suggesting that trust respond to government performance. "Among the determinants of political trust, individual well-being proves to have a robust effect across different group of nations."

To date, no robust analysis on what forms trust for governments in Nigeria have been carried out. If any analysis has been carried out, they have concentrated on western democracies, none in emerging democracy, such as for Nigeria. Knowing what citizens think about trust and governance, for example, will be helpful for understanding how trust for governments in Nigeria are formed. A micro-level analysis using public opinion survey data (question by question) is important if empirical linkages are to be established. Therefore, this study will use citizens' response to questions to investigate how trust for government in Nigeria is formed.

This study analyzed Afrobarometer Round Four survey data, which was conducted in 2008 by a consortium of Africanist researcher in collaboration with Michigan State University, in the U.S.A. The Afrobarometer survey series represents a large-scale, cross-national survey research project designed to systematically map mass attitudes to democracy, markets, and civil society in more than a dozen sub-Saharan African nations over time. For detail explanation of the survey methodology and sampling strategy, please see Afrobarometer survey group web site (Afrobarometer.org).

The questionnaire asked respondents what they think about a variety of national issue. Although, the survey do not contain specific question on trust for their governments, or on specific issues that determine trusts, but do include items which provide useful overall summary of the factors that determine trust for government. Dependent variable, Trust in government was computed from trust in the president, members of the parliament, independence national electoral commission (INEC), and members of the local government council. The variable was computed by 1 if the respondent had answered can trust on any of the variables, 0 if otherwise.

The correlates of trust, that is, the independent variables, such as Media were computed if the respondent listened to radio, read the newspaper, and watched television. The variable was computed to 1 if the respondent had answered he has access to any of the variable, 0 if otherwise. Political participation was computed if the responded had agreed to voted and or participated in any protest-which is unconventional participation. The variable was computed to 1 if the respondent had answered participated in any of the variable, 0 if otherwise. Interpersonal trust was computed from trust in relative, trust people, and trusts other Nigerians. Interpersonal trust was computed by 1 if respondent had answered can trust on any of the variables, 0 if otherwise. Survey respondents were asked of their well-being in the form of if they have "gone without food, water, medicine, fuel for cooking, and income." If they answered "never" it was computed to 1, 0 if otherwise. The rest of the independent (control) variables were left at their responses rate.

Since the dependent variable (political trust) has 2 ordinal categories, parameters estimate are estimated using Binary logistic regression in SPSS. The model comprises all the independent variable as predictors. Thus, the model is specified as:

$$\text{TRUST_GOVT} = f(\beta_0 + \beta_2\text{MEDIA} + \beta_3\text{INTEREST_PUBLIC} + \beta_4\text{DISCUSS_POLITICS} + \beta_5\text{RELIGIOUS_MEB} + \beta_6\text{PARTI} + \beta_7\text{INTER_TRUST} + \beta_8\text{EDUCATION} + \beta_9\text{RELIGION} + \beta_{10}\text{GONE_WOUT} + \beta_{11}\text{GENDER} + \beta_{12}\text{HAND_ECON} + \beta_{13}\text{HAND_CORRP})$$

Where: TRUST_GOVT = no/yes (1 or 0) that they trust the government; MEDIA = Sources of news outlet available to the respondents, INTEREST_PUBLIC = interest in public affairs, DISCUSS_POLITICS = discuss politics often, RELIGIOUS_MEB = belongs or a member of any religious organization, PARTI = participated in either election or protest, INTER_TRUST = extent of personal trust, EDUCATION = educational attainment of respondents, RELIGION = if respondents believes in any religion, GONE_WOUT = those that do not have basic items, GENDER = gender of respondents, HAND_ECON = performance of the economy, HAND_CORRP = government handling of corruption issues; β 's = parameters to be estimated.

Findings

A total of 2,324 respondents were surveyed by the Afrobarometer group in Nigeria in 2008. Of this number, 50.1 percent were males, compared to 49.9 percent females. The findings reveal that educational attainment of respondents varies- 12.5 percent have no formal education, 14.2 percent with elementary education, almost half (45.8 percent) of the respondents have secondary education, compare to 11.9 percent who have some form of university education. See Figure 1. Of the total survey respondents, about 90 percent agreed they "trust their relative", 78 percent claimed they "trust other persons they know", and while 62.5 percent claimed they "trust other Nigerians."

Of the total respondents, 57.1 percent reported that the government is managing "corruption badly", compared to 39.9 percent who claimed the government is "handling corruption well." 60.3 percent reported they voted in 2007 general elections, while majority (80.7 percent) of the respondents reported that they have not partaken in any protest. 20 percent admits they have "never discussed politics", compared to 78.8 percent who reported "discussed politics." Eighty percent reported "interest in public affairs", compared to 18.8 percent who admitted "no interest in public affairs." Eighty-four percent reported to "get news from television", compared to 55.9 who claimed to get their "news from the newspaper."

Furthermore, 45.6 percent reported they have "never gone without food", 41.2 percent "never without medical care", 41.4 percent have "never gone without cooking fuel", and 31.9 percent have "never gone without cash income. Of the total survey respondents, only 17 percent reported they do "not trust the president", 24.9 percent, do "not trust members of parliament", 34.6 percent admitted "no trust for INEC", while only 29.9 percent reported "no trust for elected local government."

Further disaggregating the data by simple crosstabs reveals that 83.1 percent of those who reported interpersonal trust also trust the government. The finding also reveals that 63.6 percent of those who reported participation in government also trust government. About 86.9 percent of those who claimed media exposure reported they trust the government. About 48 percent of those who reported that the government is handling corruption badly indicated that they trust the government. The implication of this is that whether people believed the government or not in fighting corruption, they still trust the government.

To test the general hypotheses outline in the model above, multivariate logistic regression using SPSS was conducted on the full sample. 80 percent of the 2,324 participants were included in the analyses. The model comprises all the independent variables identified in the literature and those of interest to the researcher as predictors. Of the variables that were in the model, only 8 were statistically significant as influences of trust in government of Nigeria. See Table 2 for various level of statistical significance. Those who have interpersonal trust are significantly more likely ($p < .001$) to trust the government. Media consumption has an influential effect on trust in government. The more exposed someone is to the media the more likely ($P < 0.05$) they are to trust the government, the study suggests.

With regard to those who are interested in public affairs, they are significantly more likely ($p < 0.10$) to trust the government. Also, there is religious membership effect: those who claimed belong to any religious organization are significantly less likely ($p < .05$) to have trust for the government. The negative sign for membership of religious denote that, only those who are not religious or non associates of religion trust the government. Looking at table 2, religion has no effect. This concurs with previous findings (Bourne, et al.) that follower of religion place trust not on humans, but God, or deity of the religious believer. "Trust ye not in a friend, put ye no confidence in a guide...." (Bourne, et al., 2010. p. 25). Political participation and interpersonal trust have effects as well.

With respect to those who lack basic essentials of life, that is, those who reported that they lack water, food, medical care, and money, are significantly less likely ($p < .10$) to trust the government. As table 2 shows, those that believe in the economic performance or the government is handling the economy very well are significantly more likely ($p < .001$) to trust the government. At the same time, those who believed that the government is handling corruption issues very well are significantly more likely ($p < .005$) to trust the government.

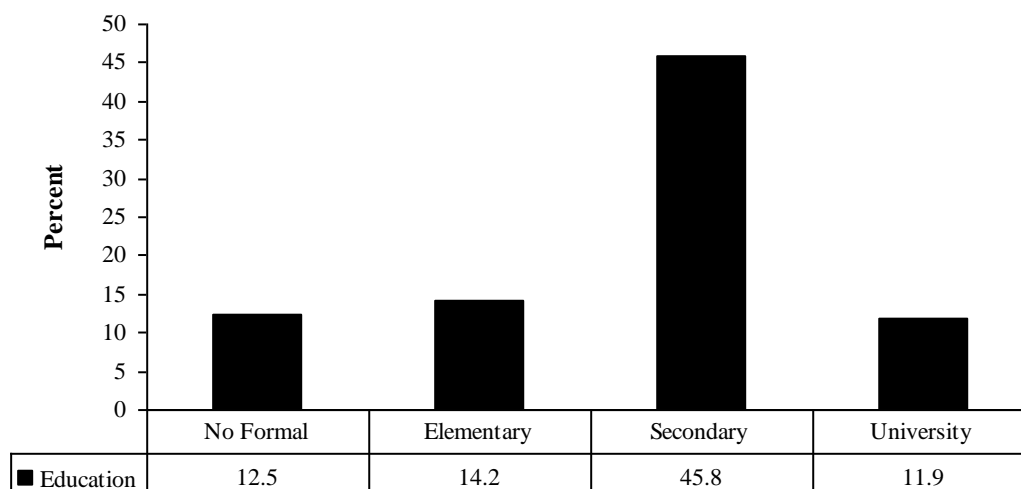


Figure 1: Educational Level of Respondents in Nigeria, 2008 Afrobarometer Survey

Table 1: Socio-political Characteristics of Sample, Afrobarometer Survey, 2008

Characteristics: N (2,324)	(%) Percent

Gender	
Male	51.9
Female	49.1
Education	
No Formal	12.5
Elementary	14.2
Secondary	45.8
University	11.9
Interpersonal Trust-Trust:	
Relatives	90
Other Person	78
Nigerians	62.5
Management of Corruption	
Badly	57.1
Well	39.9
Participation	
Voted	60.3
Never Protested	80.7
Never Discuss Politics	20
Discuss Politics	78.2
Interest in Public Affairs	80
Not interested in Public affairs	19
Media	
Television	84
Newspaper	56
Well-Being-never gone without	
Food	46
Medical care	41.2
Cooking Fuel	41.4
Cash Income	40
Political Trust-Trust:	
President	80
Parliament	85
INEC	65
Local Governments	70

Table 2. Logistic Regression of Trust in Government in Nigeria, 2008 Afrobarometer Surveys

Predictor Variables:	β 's
Media	0.749 (0.388)**
Interest in Public Affairs	0.335 (0.181)*
Discuss Politics	-0.131 (0.143)
Religious Member	-0.317 (0.162)**
Political Participation	0.290 (0.170)*
Interpersonal trust	0.706 (0.221)***
Education	0.056 (1.420)
Religion	2.269 (0.097)
Gone without basic	-0.321 (0.178)*
Gender	-0.111 (0.160)
Handling Economy	0.742 (0.109)***
Handling Corruption	0.273 (0.087)**
Nagelkerke R ²	0.144
Observations	2, 324
*** p < 0.01; ** p < 0.05; * p < 0.10; (one-tailed test)	
Standard errors in parentheses	

Conclusion

The current study revealed that political trust or trust for governments in Nigeria stems from a number of factors. These are interpersonal trust, media, interest in public affairs, religious members, political participation, individual well-being, economy performance, and handling of corruption issues. The findings reveal that the variables that influence trust in government the most are interpersonal trust and handling of corruption issue. Those that reported interpersonal trust also reported that they have trust for the government. While those that believe the government are fighting corruption have a tendency to trust in the government.

One of the interesting findings or that which was replicated by this study is that of being a religious member. A non-religious member is more likely to trust the government than those who claim to belong to any religious organization. This finding highlights the role of religion in Nigeria society. Highly religious people are less trusting than non religious ones, according to the findings. One of the emphases of religion is the teaching that believers should not trust in creation, but rather, God Almighty. With this in the minds of believers, trusting in man or the government is sharing belief with God.

With the daily upsurge in newspaper reporting of corruption within and outside of governments, the result still suggests that citizens have trust for governments. This outcome may also point to the fact that the people trusted the government of late Umaru Yar' Adua because of perceived belief in his fight against corruption.

Policy Implication

Nigeria no doubts is a country full of religious people. Most inhabitants profess faith in one Almighty God, but through different mediums. If those that claim religious memberships don't have trust for their government, it could explain the non solution of government efforts in uniting Moslem and Christian's division in some part of the country, especially in the northern part. Governments should as matter of policy, advocate method by which this belligerent groups can communicate as it evidence they do not trust the government.

One general limitation of this study is the low R^2 of the analyses. However, despite these data limitation, the study has been able to derive meaningful results that appear fairly robust. While caution is needed in drawing conclusion, it is clear that interpersonal trust, media, interest in public affairs, religious members, political participation, life without basic needs-individual well-being, economy performance, and handling of corruption issues significantly influence trust for governments in Nigeria.

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