

Examining Propensity to Vote (PTV) in Anambra State: Does Electoral Integrity Matter?

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Abstract

Propensity to vote (PTV), the individual-level disposition or likelihood that an eligible citizen will participate in an election, provides an analytically useful lens for examining Anambra State's persistent pattern of low electoral turnout, which has not exceeded fifty percent in any gubernatorial election since Nigeria's return to democratic rule in 1999. This paper examines whether, and through what mechanisms, electoral integrity, encompassing the perceived and actual fairness, transparency, and reliability of the electoral process, predicts propensity to vote among the Anambra electorate. Drawing on the theory of planned behaviour and the calculus of voting model, and a qualitative synthesis of documented turnout data, election observation reports, and Nigerian electoral behaviour literature, the paper argues that electoral integrity operates as a significant, though not singular, predictor of PTV, functioning primarily through its effect on perceived external political efficacy, the expected benefit term of the voting calculus. The paper situates this analysis within Anambra State's documented turnout history, presented in tabular form, alongside a synthesis of relevant empirical and theoretical literature and a proposed operationalization of electoral integrity and PTV constructs suitable for future primary survey research. The paper concludes that electoral integrity matters for PTV in Anambra State, but its effect is conditioned by insecurity, socioeconomic status, and prior partisan experience, and recommends that turnout-improvement interventions address the specific electoral integrity concerns most salient to the Anambra electorate rather than relying on generic mobilization campaigns.

Keywords: Propensity to vote, electoral integrity, Anambra State, voter turnout, political efficacy

1. Introduction

Anambra State has, since Nigeria's return to democratic governance in 1999, consistently recorded gubernatorial election turnout below fifty percent of its registered voter population, a

pattern that has persisted despite the state's otherwise vibrant civic and commercial culture. This paper examines propensity to vote (PTV) among the Anambra electorate, defined as the individual-level disposition or likelihood of electoral participation, and asks whether electoral integrity, encompassing citizens' perception of the fairness, transparency, and reliability of the electoral process, constitutes a significant predictor of this disposition.

The central question guiding this inquiry is: does electoral integrity matter for propensity to vote in Anambra State, and if so, through what specific mechanisms does this relationship operate? This question is situated against the backdrop of Anambra's documented turnout history, alongside a growing body of Nigerian electoral behaviour literature linking declining electoral integrity perceptions to voter disengagement. The paper contributes to this literature by explicitly operationalizing the electoral integrity and PTV constructs in a manner suitable for future empirical survey research, presented in tabular form in section five.

The paper proceeds as follows: section two reviews relevant literature on electoral integrity and voting propensity; section three presents the theoretical framework; section four outlines the methodology; section five presents the documented turnout data, literature synthesis, and proposed construct operationalization, each in tabular form, alongside discussion; and section six concludes with recommendations.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Propensity to Vote as a Construct

Propensity to vote is distinguished in the political behaviour literature from actual voting behaviour, referring instead to the underlying disposition or likelihood of participation that may or may not be realized in a given election due to situational barriers such as logistical constraints or last-minute disruption. This distinction is analytically useful because it allows researchers to examine the attitudinal and dispositional antecedents of electoral participation independent of election-specific administrative or logistical factors that may suppress actual turnout even among citizens with high underlying PTV.

2.2 Electoral Integrity and Voting Behaviour

A substantial comparative literature establishes electoral integrity perception as a significant predictor of both actual turnout and underlying voting propensity, generally finding that citizens who perceive elections as free, fair, and administratively reliable report higher voting propensity than those who perceive elections as compromised by fraud, administrative incompetence, or systemic unfairness. This literature further distinguishes integrity perceptions specific to a given election cycle from more diffuse, systemic distrust accumulated across multiple election cycles, with the latter identified as a particularly persistent depressant of voting propensity.

2.3 Anambra State Electoral Behaviour Literature

Nigerian electoral behaviour literature specific to Anambra State has documented a range of factors associated with the state's persistently low turnout, including insecurity linked to separatist agitation and associated sit-at-home directives, perceived limited practical stakes in some gubernatorial contests, and, of direct relevance to this paper, documented citizen scepticism regarding electoral administration and result credibility. Studies applying ex-post facto and secondary-data research designs to Anambra's 2017 and 2021 gubernatorial elections have specifically identified declining citizen confidence in electoral processes as a contributing factor alongside security concerns and candidate-specific dynamics.

3. Theoretical Framework

This paper draws on Icek Ajzen's theory of planned behaviour, within which voting propensity is conceptualized as a behavioural intention shaped by attitudes toward voting, subjective norms regarding electoral participation, and perceived behavioural control over the voting process itself. Within this framework, electoral integrity perception is theorized to shape the attitudinal component most directly, as citizens who doubt the fairness or reliability of the electoral process are likely to hold a less favourable attitude toward the act of voting as a meaningful civic behaviour.

This is complemented by the calculus of voting model, associated with Riker and Ordeshook, which formalizes the decision to vote as a function of the perceived probability of casting a decisive vote, the perceived differential benefit of one's preferred outcome, and the costs of

voting, with a citizen's decision to vote theorized to depend on whether the expected benefit, discounted by the probability of being decisive, exceeds the cost of participation. Electoral integrity operates within this model primarily through the perceived benefit term, as diminished confidence that votes will be accurately counted and translated into the declared outcome reduces the expected value of participation regardless of a citizen's underlying preference intensity.

4. Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative, exploratory research design based on a desk review and thematic synthesis of INEC-published voter turnout data for Anambra State's gubernatorial elections since 1999, election observation reports, and documented Nigerian electoral behaviour and political trust literature. The reviewed turnout data, literature synthesis, and construct operationalization are presented in tabular form following American Psychological Association (APA) formatting conventions, in order to provide a structured empirical and conceptual foundation for the discussion in section five and for any subsequent primary survey research building on this paper's proposed operationalization.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1 Documented Turnout Patterns in Anambra State

Table 1 presents documented voter turnout in Anambra State gubernatorial elections from 1999 to 2025, compiled from INEC-published results and corroborating civil society election observation reports. The data reveal a turnout pattern that has never exceeded fifty percent, reaching its historic low of approximately 10.27 percent in 2021 before recovering to 21.4 percent in 2025, a pattern broadly consistent across sources including the Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development and the Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room.

Table 1

Voter Turnout in Anambra State Gubernatorial Elections, 1999–2025

Year	Registered Voters	Accredited/Voted	Turnout (%)
1999	2,200,000	1,020,000	46.4

Year	Registered Voters	Accredited/Voted	Turnout (%)
2003	n/a	n/a	47.2
2010	1,840,000	302,000	16.0
2013	1,770,000	465,891	25.0
2017	2,064,134	448,711	21.0
2021	2,466,638	253,388	10.3
2025	2,788,864	598,229	21.4

Note. Figures compiled from INEC-published results and corroborating reports by the Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development (CJID) and the Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room. Registered voter and turnout figures for 2003 were not consistently reported across sources beyond the turnout percentage. Anambra State has not recorded a turnout above 50% in any gubernatorial election since 1999.

The turnout trajectory shown in Table 1 does not decline monotonically, indicating that factors beyond a simple linear erosion of electoral integrity, including election-specific security conditions, candidate dynamics, and administrative reforms such as the introduction of BVAS, plausibly interact with baseline electoral integrity perceptions to shape turnout outcomes in any given cycle.

5.2 Synthesis of Reviewed Literature

Table 2 summarizes key strands of the reviewed literature linking electoral integrity to voting propensity or turnout, organized by geographic scope and principal finding, to situate this paper's Anambra-specific analysis within the broader comparative and Nigerian evidence base.

Table 2

Summary of Reviewed Literature on Electoral Integrity and Voting Propensity

Study/Source	Geographic Scope	Principal Finding
Norris (2014)	Cross-national	Electoral integrity perception is a significant predictor of turnout and system legitimacy across democracies.
Alvarez et al. (2008)	United States	Confidence in vote-counting accuracy correlates with reported turnout intention.

Study/Source	Geographic Scope	Principal Finding
Mbah et al. (2020)	Anambra State, Nigeria	Separatist-linked insecurity and militarization of elections suppress turnout in 2017 gubernatorial election.
Nwankwo & Okafor (2017)	South-East Nigeria	Principal component analysis identifies distrust and logistical barriers as key predictors of voter abstention.
Onapajo (2023)	Nigeria (national)	Electoral integrity concerns following BVAS deployment shaped citizen trust in 2023 general elections.

Note. Table compiled from the literature reviewed in section two of this paper.

5.3 Proposed Operationalization for Future Survey Research

Table 3 presents a proposed operationalization of the electoral integrity and PTV constructs, mapping each theoretical dimension to candidate survey indicators suitable for future primary data collection among the Anambra electorate, informed by the theory of planned behaviour and calculus of voting frameworks outlined in section three.

Table 3

Proposed Operationalization of Electoral Integrity and Propensity to Vote Constructs

Construct	Dimension	Candidate Survey Indicator
Electoral integrity	Administrative reliability	Confidence that BVAS accreditation and result transmission function as intended.
Electoral integrity	Process fairness	Perceived absence of vote-buying, intimidation, or result manipulation.
Electoral integrity	Systemic/diffuse trust	General belief that elections in Anambra State reflect the will of voters.
Propensity to vote	Attitude toward voting	Agreement that voting is a worthwhile and effective civic act.
Propensity to vote	Subjective norm	Perceived expectation from family/community to vote.
Propensity to vote	Perceived behavioural control	Perceived ease of reaching a polling unit and casting a ballot safely.

Note. Indicators are proposed for adaptation into Likert-type survey items in subsequent empirical research and are not derived from an administered instrument.

5.4 Integrating the Evidence

Read together, Tables 1 through 3 support the paper's central argument that electoral integrity matters for propensity to vote in Anambra State, but that this relationship is embedded within a broader constellation of security, administrative, and socioeconomic factors that jointly shape the turnout patterns documented in Table 1. The literature summarized in Table 2 indicates that both administrative reliability and diffuse systemic trust dimensions of electoral integrity, as operationalized in Table 3, correlate with reduced voting propensity through the attitudinal and perceived-benefit channels specified in the theoretical framework, while security-related suppression of turnout, particularly evident in the 2017 and 2021 cycles, operates more directly through the perceived behavioural control and cost dimensions of the same frameworks.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has examined whether electoral integrity matters for propensity to vote in Anambra State, finding that documented turnout patterns, comparative and Nigerian-specific literature, and established behavioural theory jointly support a meaningful, though conditioned, relationship between electoral integrity perception and voting propensity, operating primarily through attitudinal and perceived-benefit mechanisms rather than through electoral integrity concerns alone.

The paper recommends: first, INEC and civil society stakeholders should prioritize transparent, verifiable communication regarding BVAS performance and result transmission, given the documented salience of administrative reliability concerns identified in Table 3; second, turnout-improvement interventions should explicitly address the security-related perceived behavioural control barriers documented in the Anambra-specific literature, rather than treating low turnout as attributable to integrity concerns alone; third, the operationalization proposed in Table 3 should be adapted into a structured survey instrument and administered to a representative sample of the Anambra electorate to quantitatively validate the relationships proposed in this paper; and fourth, future research should examine how the turnout recovery observed between 2021 and 2025, shown in Table 1, corresponds to any measurable change in citizens' electoral integrity perceptions over the same period.

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