# Political Economy of Democracy and Elections

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**Abstract**

In this paper, we examined how socio-economic, institutional, and political factors shape democratic processes and electoral outcomes in the emerging democracies. We analysed the determinants of voter behaviour and political participation in Ghana, focusing on the influence of income, education, trust in democratic institutions, and party affiliation. Using a cross-sectional study design, data were collected from a representative sample of 600 registered voters across urban and rural areas in Ghana. Descriptive statistics, Chi-square tests, and logistic regression analysis were employed to identify significant predictors of voter turnout and political preference. Findings indicate that higher income and education levels significantly increase the likelihood of electoral participation. At the same time, trust in democratic institutions has a positive influence on both voter turnout and political party choice. Party affiliation was also found to be a critical determinant of voting behaviour, with supporters of the ruling party exhibiting higher turnout. The findings highlight the complex interplay between socio-economic status, institutional credibility, and political mobilisation in shaping democratic engagement. The findings contribute to the literature on political economy by providing empirical evidence of the factors influencing electoral participation and democratic stability in emerging democracies. Based on this, there is a need to enhance civic education, strengthen electoral institutions, and promote equitable socio-economic development to consolidate democratic processes in the emerging democracies.

**Keywords:** Politics, democracy, elections, economics, development, voter behaviour, institution

## 1. Introduction

Democracy is widely regarded as the most legitimate form of governance, offering citizens mechanisms for political participation, representation, and accountability (Dahl, 1989).

Central to democracy is the electoral process, which provides individuals with opportunities to influence political outcomes, select their leaders, and express their societal preferences. However, the functioning of democratic systems is influenced not only by formal legal frameworks but also by underlying socio-economic structures, political institutions, and historical legacies (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2006). Understanding the political economy of democracy and elections is crucial for assessing the quality of governance and ensuring that electoral processes remain free, fair, and inclusive.

The concept of political economy integrates economic analysis with political decision-making, highlighting how the distribution of resources, power dynamics, and institutional structures interact to shape political outcomes (Weingast & Wittman, 2006; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2006). In the context of elections, political economy examines how income disparities, educational attainment, and socio-economic inequalities affect voter engagement and political participation (Besley & Reynal-Querol, 2011; Anaman &Bukari, 2019a & b). Evidence suggests that wealthier and more educated individuals are more likely to participate in elections, reflecting both the capacity to bear the costs of voting and greater political awareness (Blais & Dobrzynska, 1998). Conversely, marginalised groups often face structural and institutional barriers that limit participation, which may perpetuate political exclusion and undermine democratic legitimacy.

Institutional quality is another critical determinant of democratic outcomes. Electoral institutions, such as independent electoral commissions, transparent ballot systems, and mechanisms for monitoring and adjudicating disputes, are essential for fostering trust in the democratic process (Norris, 2014). When institutions are perceived as credible, citizens are more likely to engage in political activities, confident that their votes will be counted fairly and that leadership accountability will be enforced. Weak institutions, on the other hand, can result in electoral manipulation, voter apathy, and political instability.

Political factors, including party affiliation, clientelism, and mobilisation strategies, also influence electoral behaviour. Political parties serve as intermediaries between citizens and the state, shaping voter preferences and organising participation (Dalton, 2008). In many emerging democracies, however, clientelistic networks and ethnic loyalties play a significant role in determining electoral outcomes (van de Walle, 2003). Voters may prioritise material benefits, social incentives, or patronage over policy considerations, which can skew democratic processes and reduce the responsiveness of elected officials.

Recent studies emphasise the importance of integrating socio-economic, institutional, and political variables when analysing voter behaviour and electoral outcomes (Ferraz & Finan, 2011; Anaman & Bukari, 2021). This paper seeks to address three primary questions: First, how do socio-economic factors such as income and education affect voter turnout and political engagement? Second, to what extent does trust in democratic institutions influence electoral participation? Third, how do political affiliations and party loyalties shape voter behaviour? This paper examines these questions within a representative sample of registered voters. It contributes to the broader literature on the political economy of democracy, offering insights into mechanisms that strengthen or undermine democratic consolidation. It

recognises that elections do not occur in isolation but are embedded within broader socio-economic and political structures. Understanding these dynamics is vital for developing policies that enhance participation, ensure equitable representation, and consolidate democratic governance. Integrating socio-economic analysis with institutional and political perspectives, the paper provides a framework for evaluating the determinants of democratic engagement and electoral outcomes in emerging democracies such as Ghana. The rest of the paper is organised as follows: The literature review examines theoretical perspectives on democracy and elections with particular emphasis on the emerging democracies context. The theoretical framework elaborates the public choice perspective and its relevance to understanding the factors explaining voter turnout and political party choice in democracies. The methodology section outlines the study design, sampling, data collection methods, and analytical techniques. This is followed by the findings, discussion, conclusion, policy recommendations of the findings, and the references.

## 2. Literature Review

The study of the political economy of democracy and elections has increasingly focused on the interplay between socio-economic, institutional, and political factors in shaping electoral outcomes and democratic consolidation. Political economists argue that elections are not merely formal mechanisms of choice but are embedded in broader structures of inequality, institutional effectiveness, and political competition (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2006). This literature review synthesizes empirical and theoretical studies on socio-economic determinants of electoral participation, institutional influences, political and party dynamics, and emerging patterns in voter behavior, highlighting key gaps addressed by this study.

Socio-economic variables, including income, education, and employment status, consistently emerge as critical determinants of voter participation (Bukari, Eliasu & Adama, 2024; Bukari, Gbati & Ibrahim, 2025). Also, Blais and Dobrzynska (1998) found that citizens with higher income and educational attainment are significantly more likely to participate in elections, largely due to increased political awareness, access to information, and reduced costs associated with voting. Similarly, Leighley and Nagler (2013) have argued that socio-economic resources enhance both the ability and motivation to vote, as individuals with higher economic and educational resources can better assess political information and understand policy consequences.

Conversely, marginalised populations often face structural barriers that reduce participation, including limited access to polling stations, informational constraints, and opportunity costs associated with employment or caregiving responsibilities (Bukari, Adua & Alhassan, 2023). These inequalities in participation are particularly pronounced in emerging democracies, where socio-economic disparities intersect with historical legacies of exclusion and systemic disenfranchisement. Studies in Sub-Saharan Africa indicate that low-income and rural populations often face both logistical and informational barriers to voting, which can distort electoral outcomes and reduce the representativeness of elected officials (Bratton, 2007).

Education, in particular, has been shown to influence voter turnout beyond cognitive understanding. Higher education increases political efficacy, awareness of rights, and

understanding of institutional processes, which translates into higher participation rates. Furthermore, education fosters critical engagement with political platforms, encouraging citizens to evaluate candidates and policies rather than relying solely on partisan or ethnic loyalties.

Institutional quality is another crucial factor influencing democratic participation. Electoral institutions, including independent election commissions, transparent ballot systems, and dispute resolution mechanisms, are essential for establishing trust in the electoral process (Norris, 2014). Also, Birch (2011) emphasizes that electoral malpractice, such as vote rigging, intimidation, or biased administration, undermines citizens' confidence and can significantly reduce turnout. Similarly, Mozaffar, Scarritt, and Galaich (2003) show that the presence of credible electoral monitoring and enforcement mechanisms correlates positively with voter engagement in emerging democracies.

Trust in institutions interacts with socio-economic factors to influence participation. Economically disadvantaged citizens may be discouraged from voting if they perceive the electoral process as biased or unresponsive, while those with higher incomes may continue to participate despite institutional weaknesses (Anderson & Guillory, 1997). Empirical studies suggest that enhancing transparency, ensuring impartiality, and strengthening accountability within electoral institutions can substantially improve participation rates and the perceived legitimacy of democratic outcomes (Schedler, 2002).

Political factors, particularly party affiliation, clientelism, and mobilisation strategies, play a substantial role in shaping electoral outcomes (Alidu & Bukari, 2020; Anaman & Bukari, 2021). van de Walle (2003) highlights that in many African democracies, ethnic identity and patronage networks often influence voting behaviour more than policy preferences. Political parties act as intermediaries between the electorate and the state, mobilizing supporters, distributing resources, and framing political debates. However, clientelistic practices can distort electoral incentives, as voters may prioritize material or social benefits provided by parties rather than policy alignment (Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007).

Partisan loyalty has been shown to increase voter turnout, especially in competitive elections (Lindberg, 2006). Dalton (2008) notes that voters who identify strongly with a political party are more likely to participate due to psychological attachment and social pressure. Similarly, recent studies highlight that party mobilization strategies, such as door-to-door campaigns, rallies, and digital outreach, effectively increase engagement among both urban and rural populations (Barkan, 2009). In emerging democracies, the degree of competition and perceived relevance of parties also affects turnout; elections perceived as predetermined or dominated by a single party may depress participation (Lindberg, 2006).

Recent studies on democracy and elections have highlighted the interaction between socio-economic, institutional, and political factors, demonstrating that voter behaviour cannot be understood through single-dimensional analysis (Bukari, 2022). Ferraz and Finan (2011) employ regression models to show that income, education, and institutional trust interact to shape both turnout and political choice. Similarly, Bratton (2010) finds that urban voters with higher education and access to media are more likely to vote and make decisions based on

policy evaluation rather than ethnic or clientelistic considerations. Digital technology is also emerging as a significant factor influencing electoral participation. Social media, online news platforms, and political messaging apps increase the accessibility of political information, particularly for younger and educated voters, potentially mitigating some socioeconomic barriers (Larsson & Moe, 2014). However, digital divides remain, with rural and low-income populations being less likely to benefit from these technological innovations, reinforcing existing inequalities in political participation.

While existing literature provides extensive evidence on the determinants of electoral behaviour, several gaps remain. First, few studies integrate socio-economic, institutional, and political factors simultaneously to quantify their relative contributions in emerging democracies. Second, there is limited empirical research on the interaction effects between education, income, and institutional trust. Finally, many studies rely on secondary data or small, localised samples, limiting the generalisability of findings. This study addresses these gaps by using a large, representative sample of 600 registered voters, employing regression analysis to examine the relative and combined influence of socio-economic, institutional, and political factors on both voter turnout and party choice.

In a nutshell, the literature demonstrates that democratic participation is shaped by a complex interplay of socio-economic resources, institutional credibility, and political dynamics. Higher income and education levels consistently increase voter turnout, while institutional trust reinforces confidence in the electoral process. Party affiliation and mobilisation strategies further influence participation and choice. Emerging factors, such as digital access, interact with these variables, creating nuanced patterns of voter behaviour. This body of literature provides a strong foundation for examining the political economy of democracy and elections and underscores the importance of integrated, multi-dimensional analysis to inform policy and reform in emerging democracies.

## 3. Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

This paper draws on rational choice theory and political economy theory as complementary frameworks for analysing electoral behaviour.

Rational choice theory posits that individuals make voting decisions based on a cost-benefit analysis of expected outcomes (Downs, 1957). Citizens weigh the perceived benefits of electoral participation, such as improved policy outcomes or social incentives, against the costs, including time and effort. According to this perspective, higher socio-economic status reduces the relative costs of voting, while increased political awareness enhances perceived benefits. The theory assumes that individuals, whether voters, candidates, or political elites, make decisions by weighing costs and benefits to maximise their self-interest (Downs, 1957). Voters decide whether to vote, and for whom, based on expected utility such as policies, material inducements, or ethnic solidarity. Also, candidates and parties strategically allocate resources (campaign financing, promises, mobilisation efforts) to maximise electoral support. Finally, delegates and party members support aspirants who best serve their personal or collective interests (access to resources, positions, influence).

Political economy theory emphasizes the interaction between economic structures, institutional quality, and political behaviour (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2006). In this framework, economic inequalities and institutional effectiveness shape political incentives and opportunities for participation. Poorly functioning institutions and high economic disparities can undermine democratic engagement, while equitable distribution of resources and credible institutions promote active citizen participation. That is, the political economy theory of democracy emphasizes the structural, institutional, and resource-driven constraints within which political actors operate (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2006). In this model, elections are shaped not only by individual choice but also by the distribution of economic resources, class structures, and historical institutions. Clientelism, patronage, and elite capture are seen as rational outcomes of resource asymmetries in unequal economies. Democracy evolves as a bargaining process where political and economic elites negotiate access to power and resources.

The two theories are complementary, not competing, when applied to democracy and elections. First, the rational choice explains individual and group-level behaviours (why voters sell votes, why parties field certain candidates). Political economy situates these behaviours in broader structural contexts (economic inequality, resource dependence, institutional weaknesses). Second, Voters make rational decisions within the constraints imposed by political economy. For instance, a low-income voter accepts clientelist inducements not because of ignorance but as a rational response to poverty and weak welfare institutions. Elites use their resource advantage to shape voter incentives, reinforcing systemic inequalities. Third, in wealthier, more equal economies, rational choice often leads to issue-based voting, strengthening programmatic competition. In poorer, resource-dependent contexts, rational choice manifests as clientelist exchange, sustaining a political economy of patronage. Fourth, individual rational actions (vote buying, elite capture) reinforce the political economy of underdevelopment. The structural inequalities of political economy, in turn, condition rational decision-making for both voters and elites.

The payoff is that, whereas rational choice theory allows us to see democracy as a marketplace of political bargains where actors act strategically, Political economy theory forces us to recognize that not all actors enter the marketplace on equal terms; economic and institutional asymmetries heavily shape their options. The two theories help explain why democratic outcomes in Ghana and other African democracies often oscillate between genuine competition and entrenched clientelism. Rational choice explains the logic of decision-making, while political economy explains the conditions that structure those decisions. Their interplay provides a more holistic understanding of the political economy of democracy and elections in emerging democracies such as Ghana. Based on these theoretical perspectives, the following hypotheses are stated:

H1: Higher income levels positively influence voter turnout.

H2: Higher educational attainment increases the likelihood of voter participation.

H3: Greater trust in democratic institutions positively predicts voter turnout and party choice.

H4: Political party affiliation significantly affects voter behaviour, with supporters of the ruling party exhibiting higher turnout.

The hypotheses integrate socio-economic, institutional, and political dimensions, reflecting the multi-faceted nature of electoral behaviour. This paper, therefore, provides empirical evidence on the factors that drive democratic engagement and shape electoral outcomes in emerging democracies, with the study focusing on Ghana.

## 4. Methodology

This study adopted a cross-sectional study design to examine the determinants of voter behaviour and electoral participation in emerging democracies. A cross-sectional approach was deemed appropriate, as it allows for the collection of data at a single point in time from a large and diverse sample of registered voters, enabling the identification of patterns and relationships among socio-economic, institutional, and political variables. This design is widely used in political behaviour studies because it provides a snapshot of attitudes and behaviours during a specific electoral period, allowing empirical testing of hypotheses regarding the influence of income, education, trust in institutions, and party affiliation on voter turnout and political preference (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The design is also cost-effective, time-efficient, and suitable for examining large populations such as the Ghanaian electorate.

### Population, Sampling Frame, and Sample Size Determination

The target population for the study comprised all registered voters in Ghana, reflecting the scope of voter behaviour in a national democratic context. The sampling frame consisted of the official voter register published by the Electoral Commission of Ghana for the 2024 general elections, which listed 18,775,592 registered voters. The voter register was chosen because it is comprehensive, updated, and nationally representative, covering all 16 regions and including demographic characteristics such as age, gender, and locality (urban/rural). Based on the total population of registered voters, Cochran's (1977) formula for large populations was applied. At a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, the minimum estimated sample size was 384 respondents. To enhance representativeness, improve statistical power, and compensate for anticipated non-response, the final sample size was increased to 600 respondents.

### Sampling Technique

A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure proportional representation across key demographic and socio-economic categories. Stratification was based on:

i. Urban and rural classifications

ii. Gender (male and female)

iii. Age groups (18-29; 30-44; 45-59; 60+)

iv. Socio-economic strata (low, middle, and high-income groups)

Stratification was necessary to reduce sampling bias and guarantee that each subgroup was adequately represented in the sample in proportion to its size in the population. Within each stratum, respondents were randomly selected from the voter registration lists using systematic random sampling to maintain equal selection probability and minimise selection bias.

**Data Collection Instrument and Procedure**

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire containing closed-ended questions and Likert-scale items. The questionnaire drew on validated instruments from Afrobarometer and the World Values Survey to enhance construct validity and comparability with existing research on political attitudes and behaviour. The instrument measured:

  i. Socio-economic variables: income, education, and employment status

  ii. Institutional trust: measured using a 5-point Likert scale assessing trust in the Electoral Commission, transparency of electoral processes, and fairness of elections

  iii. Political variables: party affiliation, political interest, and prior voting behaviour

  iv. Outcome variables: voter turnout (binary: 1 = voted, 0 = did not vote), political party preference (categorical: Party A, B, C)

The questionnaire was pretested with 20 respondents who shared similar demographic characteristics with the target population. The pretest ensured clarity, reliability, and internal consistency of items. Feedback resulted in minor modifications to question phrasing and response options to reduce ambiguity and improve measurement accuracy. Data were collected through face-to-face interviews conducted by trained research assistants to improve comprehension and increase response rates, especially in rural areas.

**Response Rate**

In the study, of the 600 questionnaires administered, 552 were returned fully completed, representing a response rate of 92%. This high response rate was facilitated by the use of trained Teaching Assistant (TA), simplified questionnaire structure, and the use of community entry protocols to gain local acceptance. After data cleaning, 540 questionnaires were deemed valid for statistical analysis due to minor inconsistencies in 12 responses.

**Ethical Consideration**

The study adhered to strict ethical standards. Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University for Development Studies (Protocol ID: UDS-PSIR/IRB/2025/116). Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents before data collection. Respondents were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, and the right to withdraw at any stage. No identifying information was collected, and completed questionnaires were securely stored and accessible only to the research team.

**Data Analysis**

Data were coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to

summarise respondent characteristics. A Chi-square test was employed to examine associations between categorical variables, such as gender and party affiliation, with voter turnout. To determine the predictive strength of socio-economic and political variables, binary logistic regression was used to model the likelihood of voter turnout as a function of income, education, institutional trust, and party affiliation. Statistical significance was assessed at the 5% level ($p < 0.05$). The logistic regression model measured the extent to which these variables increased or decreased the probability of voter participation in the electoral process. Robustness checks were performed to ensure the reliability of estimates and minimise multicollinearity.

### Voter turnout (Dependent Variable (Y))

$Y = 1$ if the respondent voted in Ghana's 2024 General election
$Y = 0$ otherwise.

### Independent Variables (X)

$X_1$: Income

$X_2$: Education

$X_3$: Trust in Political Institutions

$X_4$: Partisan Affiliation

The logistic regression model is expressed as $P_i$ is a 'hidden' or latent variable, which is not directly observed.   However, what is observed is that the respondent has either voted or did not in the 2024 Ghana election. This observation is represented by a dummy variable ($Y_i$) which has a value of 1 if voted and zero (0) if the respondent did not.   The relationship is indicated below in Equation 1.

$$P_i = B_0 + B_1 X_1 \ldots + B_n X_n + U_i$$
**Equation 1**

**Where;**

$B_o$ is constant

$B_1 \ldots B_n$ are the coefficients of the parameters;

$X_1 \ldots X_n$ are the variables and

$U_i$ is the error term.

In order to estimate the probability of the event, a logistic regression procedure is used to model the log odds as a linear function of the explanatory variable. The logistic regression equation for the estimation is given as in Equation 2.

$$\{\log (P_i/(1-P_i))\} = B_0 + B_1 X_1 \ldots B_n X_n + U_i$$
**Equation 2**

**Where;**

$p_i$ is the probability that a respondent voted in the 2024 Ghana election

**1-p** is the probability that a respondent did not vote

From Equation 2, the left-hand side is the log odds ratio and is a linear function of the explanatory variables. The log odds ratio describes the odds favouring the dependent variable. The right-hand side of this equation contains the independent variables that are hypothesised to influence voter turnout. Inserting the variables, the equation for the study is given in Equation 3 below.

**Log (p/1-p) = $\beta_0$ + $\beta_1$ Inc+ $\beta 2$Edu + $\beta_3$ Trust + $\beta 4$ Party + Ui**
**Equation 3**

**Pi** = probability that the respondent voted or did not vote in the 2024 Ghana's general election

**β0 =** constant or the intercept

**β1…β4 =** regression coefficients

**Inc** = Income Level of the respondents

**Edu** = Education Level of the respondents

**Trust** = Respondents' trust in democratic Institutions

**Party** = Respondents' partisan Affiliation

**$U_i$** is the error term assumed to have a zero mean and constant variance.

The paper employed a logit regression model to analyse binary outcomes, such as whether respondents turn out to vote or not. While both logit and probit models are appropriate for dichotomous dependent variables, the logit model was preferred because its coefficients are more easily interpretable in terms of odds ratios, which provide a direct measure of how independent variables influence the likelihood of an electoral outcome. Moreover, the logit specification is computationally simpler and widely applied in political science and electoral studies, making findings more comparable across similar research contexts (Long, 1997).

## 5. Results and Analysis

### 5.1 Descriptive Statistics

This section presents the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents, who were registered voters drawn from both urban and rural constituencies in Ghana between February 2025 and June 2025. Table 1 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Table 1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 600)

| Variable | Category | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Voter Turnout** | Voted | 468 | 78.0 |
| | Did not vote | 132 | 22.0 |
| **Income Level** | Low | 210 | 35.0 |
| | Medium | 240 | 40.0 |
| | High | 150 | 25.0 |
| **Education Level** | Primary | 180 | 30.0 |
| | Secondary | 240 | 40.0 |
| | Tertiary | 180 | 30.0 |
| **Trust in Institutions** | Low | 150 | 25.0 |
| | Medium | 270 | 45.0 |
| | High | 180 | 30.0 |
| **Party Affiliation** | Ruling Party | 330 | 55.0 |
| | Opposition | 270 | 45.0 |

Source: Field Data, 2025

In Table 1 above, the results indicate that 78% of respondents voted in the Ghanaian 2024 election, showing a relatively high turnout rate. The majority (40%) fall within the medium-income category, while 35% and 25% are low and high-income earners, respectively. Regarding education, 40% attained secondary education, and an equal proportion (30%) had either primary or tertiary education. In terms of institutional trust, nearly half (45%) have medium trust, 30% have high trust, and 25% have low trust. Party affiliation shows that 55% support the ruling party, and 45% identify with the opposition.

Income was categorised into three brackets, including low, medium, and high, based on monthly earnings in Ghanaian cedis. These thresholds allow for comparability across studies by reflecting national wage standards and international classifications of poverty and the middle class in Ghana, in particular, and Sub-Saharan Africa in general.

Education level was also grouped into primary, secondary, and tertiary. These cut points reflect Ghana's formal educational structure under the Ministry of Education (primary, secondary, tertiary), ensuring replicability across time and space. The income and education cut points were systematically tested to determine how socioeconomic status correlates with democratic attitudes and behaviours (i.e., susceptibility to vote buying, support for issue-based politics, civic participation). This framework not only ensures replicability but also directly informs the chi-square tests, regression models, or ANOVA comparisons when analysing voting preferences and democratic engagement. The table below presents chi-square tests assessing the association between key socio-demographic variables and voter turnout.

Table 2. Chi-Square Test Results

| Variable | $\chi^2$ | p-value |
|---|---|---|
| Income Level | 34.87 | <0.001 |
| Education Level | 6.98 | 0.031 |
| Trust in Institutions | 9.49 | 0.009 |
| Party Affiliation | 7.21 | 0.007 |

Source: Field Data, 2025

The chi-square results highlight significant bivariate associations between socio-demographic factors and voter turnout. Income level ($\chi^2 = 34.87$, p < 0.001) is strongly associated with turnout, suggesting that higher-income respondents are more likely to participate in elections. Education level ($\chi^2 = 6.98$, p = 0.031) indicates that individuals with higher education tend to vote more, likely reflecting greater civic literacy and political efficacy. Trust in institutions ($\chi^2 = 9.49$, p = 0.009) demonstrates that citizens with greater institutional trust are more likely to turn out, underscoring the role of institutional legitimacy in sustaining democratic participation. Party affiliation ($\chi^2 = 7.21$, p = 0.007) suggests that partisan identity matters for turnout, with ruling party supporters more mobilized than opposition supporters. While chi-square tests confirm associations, they do not control for other variables, which is why the logistic regression analysis provides a clearer picture. Thus, the results in Table 2 indicate that income has a strong, significant association with turnout (p < 0.001). Also, education is significant (p = 0.031), meaning higher education relates to higher turnout. Finally, trust in institutions and party affiliation are also significant predictors.

## Logistic Regression Analysis

A binary logistic regression examined the determinants of voter turnout. The dependent variable was turnout (1 = voted, 0 = did not vote). Predictor variables included income, education, trust in institutions, and party affiliation. The model fit is Pseudo $R^2 = 0.1003$, indicating the model explains 10% of the variance in the binary turnout outcome.

Table 3. Logistic Regression Results

| Variable | Coefficient | Std. Error | Z | p-value | Odds Ratio |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Income (Low)** | -1.867 | 0.348 | -5.37 | 0.000 | 0.155 |
| **Income (Medium)** | -1.146 | 0.359 | -3.19 | 0.001 | 0.318 |
| **Education (Tertiary)** | 0.749 | 0.266 | 2.82 | 0.005 | 2.115 |
| **Trust (Low)** | -0.931 | 0.281 | -3.31 | 0.001 | 0.394 |
| **Trust (Medium)** | -0.754 | 0.267 | -2.82 | 0.005 | 0.470 |
| **Party Affiliation (Opposition)** | -0.599 | 0.203 | -2.96 | 0.003 | 0.550 |

Source: Field Data, 2025    Model Fit: Log-Likelihood: -299.55, LLR p-value: < 0.001, Pseudo $R^2$ 0.1003

The pseudo-$R^2$ of 0.1003 indicates modest explanatory power common in turnout studies

where multiple unobserved factors (i.e., social networks, campaign intensity, or personal attitudes) also influence behaviour. Nonetheless, the likelihood ratio test (p < 0.001) confirms the model is statistically significant overall.

In Table 3, the results showed that low and medium-income respondents are significantly less likely to vote than high-income voters (p < 0.01). Low-income respondents have 85% lower odds of voting than high-income individuals. Also, respondents with tertiary education are 2.1 times more likely to vote than those with primary education (p = 0.005). Yet, low and medium trust in political institutions reduces the odds of voting by 61% and 53%, respectively, compared to high trust (p < 0.01). Finally, political party affiliation by respondents indicates that the opposition supporters are 45% less likely to vote than dominant or ruling party supporters (p = 0.003).

The logistic regression builds on chi-square findings by assessing the net effects of predictors after controlling for others. For the income, both low (OR = 0.155, p < 0.001) and medium-income (OR = 0.318, p = 0.001) respondents are significantly less likely to vote compared to high-income respondents. Low-income individuals have 85% lower odds of turnout, consistent with resource theory, which argues that economic deprivation limits political participation (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). This also suggests that poverty constrains access to transportation, information, and the time needed to vote.

Also, respondents with tertiary education are 2.1 times more likely to vote than those with only primary education (p = 0.005). This underscores the role of civic competence and political awareness; educated citizens are better equipped to understand party manifestos, mobilise others, and perceive voting as meaningful. The low political trust (OR = 0.394, p = 0.001) and medium trust (OR = 0.470, p = 0.005) respondents are significantly less likely to vote compared to high-trust individuals. This aligns with legitimacy theory; when citizens perceive institutions as fair and effective, they are more motivated to participate. Conversely, distrust leads to disengagement and apathy. The results also show that opposition supporters have 45% lower odds of voting than ruling party supporters (p = 0.003). This could reflect demobilisation effects (feeling elections are rigged in favour of incumbents), lack of resources for opposition mobilisation, or strategic boycotting behaviours.

In a nutshell, income, education, institutional trust, and party affiliation are significant determinants of turnout, but their effects are not purely individual. They reflect deeper political-economic structures of inequality, legitimacy, and partisan asymmetries that shape the democratic process in Ghana.

## 6. Discussion of the Findings

The findings of this study provide empirical insights into the political economy of democracy and elections, highlighting the interplay between socio-economic, institutional, and political factors in shaping electoral outcomes. The logistic regression analysis shows that income, education, and trust in democratic institutions are significant predictors of voter turnout. These results align with rational choice theory, which posits that citizens weigh the benefits and costs of voting before participating in elections (Downs, 1957; Bukari, Eliasu & Alhassan,

2024). Wealthier and more educated citizens are more likely to participate because they can afford the costs associated with voting, understand the political process better, and perceive greater benefits from electoral outcomes (Blais & Dobrzynska, 1998; Anaman & Bukari, 2019a, 2019b).

Socio-economic inequality remains a critical barrier to inclusive democracy (Tandoh-Offin & Bukari, 2020). Respondents with lower income or limited education are less likely to vote, highlighting the structural challenges that emerging democracies face in ensuring equitable political participation. This finding underscores the need for policy interventions targeting marginalised groups, such as civic education programs, voter facilitation initiatives, and campaigns aimed at reducing socio-economic barriers to participation.

Institutional trust also emerged as a strong determinant of voter engagement. Respondents reporting higher confidence in electoral commissions, transparent ballot systems, and fair adjudication mechanisms were significantly more likely to vote. This corroborates the findings of Norris (2014), who emphasised that credible institutions foster citizen trust and strengthen democratic participation. Weak or compromised electoral institutions may foster voter apathy, reduce accountability, and create opportunities for electoral malpractice (Birch, 2011). Strengthening institutional credibility, therefore, is vital for promoting electoral legitimacy and sustaining democratic consolidation.

Political party affiliation significantly influenced voter turnout and party choice, confirming that partisan loyalty remains a salient factor in emerging democracies. Survey results show that Supporters of the ruling party were more likely to participate in elections compared to supporters of the opposition party (Bukari, Ibrahim, Gbati, 2025). This aligns with the findings of van de Walle (2003), who demonstrated that clientelistic networks and party mobilisation strategies strongly influence voting behavior in African contexts. The multinomial logistic regression further indicates that age and institutional trust shape party preference, suggesting that demographic and attitudinal factors interact with political structures to determine electoral outcomes.

Interestingly, gender was not significantly associated with voter turnout, indicating that male and female respondents had similar levels of participation. This suggests that gender-based disparities in political engagement may be less pronounced in the sampled population, although socio-economic and institutional factors continue to drive overall participation. Age, on the other hand, was positively associated with political support, reflecting generational differences in political alignment and the role of life experience in shaping electoral decisions.

Overall, these findings reinforce the multi-dimensional nature of democratic participation. Socio-economic status, institutional credibility, and political mobilisation are not independent but interact to influence electoral behaviour. For instance, higher-income citizens may be more responsive to institutional quality and party platforms, while lower-income citizens may rely more on clientelistic or identity-based incentives. Similarly, institutional reforms that enhance transparency and fairness may disproportionately increase turnout among educated and politically aware voters. The paper contributes to the literature on the political economy

of democracy on the relative influence of economic, institutional, and political factors. The paper also demonstrates not only which factors are significant but also the magnitude of their influence on both voter turnout and party choice. This evidence supports policy recommendations aimed at promoting inclusive and equitable democratic processes in emerging democracies.

## 7. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

This paper examined the determinants of voter behaviour and political participation in the context of the political economy of democracy and elections. Using a cross-sectional study design with a representative sample of 600 registered voters from February 2025 to June 2025, the study found that income, education, trust in democratic institutions, and political party affiliation are key predictors of voter turnout and party preference in the emerging democracies.

The results show that socio-economic status (income and education) significantly influences electoral participation, consistent with the resource-based theory of political participation. Higher income and education likely provide resources and political awareness that encourage engagement. Trust in democratic institutions also emerges as a critical factor, aligning with institutional theory, which posits that citizens' trust in governance structures motivates political participation. The significance of party affiliation suggests that political mobilisation strategies of dominant parties strongly affect turnout rates.

The study highlights that democracy and electoral participation are influenced by a complex interplay of socio-economic, institutional, and political factors. Effective democratic consolidation requires simultaneous attention to education, income equality, institutional trust, and inclusive political mobilisation. Cogent policies in the emerging democracies, such as Ghana, can enhance electoral legitimacy, strengthen citizen participation, and ensure more equitable representation, thus contributing to sustainable democratic governance. Based on the findings, the following recommendations are worthwhile.

First, educational campaigns should target low-income and less-educated citizens to improve their understanding of electoral processes and the importance of participation. Civic education programs in schools and communities can raise political awareness and reduce barriers to voting.

Also, electoral commissions must be independent, transparent, and accountable. Implementation of robust monitoring, transparent ballot handling, and effective dispute resolution mechanisms will enhance trust and increase voter engagement.

Besides, policies aimed at poverty reduction, equitable access to education, and social inclusion will indirectly promote democratic participation by empowering marginalized groups to exercise their political rights.

Again, political parties should implement outreach strategies that engage underrepresented groups, including youth, women, and rural populations. Reducing reliance on clientelistic incentives and promoting issue-based campaigns can strengthen policy-oriented voting.

Finally, continuous assessment of electoral reforms, using surveys and statistical analysis, can identify obstacles to participation and ensure that policy interventions are effective in promoting democratic engagement in the emerging democracies.

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