

MEDIA FRAMING OF POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS AND CITIZENS' MOBILISATION FOR 2023 ELECTIONS IN AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examined the correlation between media framing of political campaigns and citizens' mobilisation for 2023 elections in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. The objectives the study included: finding out the extent to which citizens were exposed to political campaigns in the media during the 2023 elections in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria; the extent to which citizens recognised major media frames of the political campaigns in the 2023 elections in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria; what media frames of the political campaigns appeal to the citizens most in the 2023 elections in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria and to ascertain whether media frames of the political campaigns in the 2023 elections did influence the voting behaviour of the citizens in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. The study adopted the survey research design where 400 respondents were drawn as sample size from the population of 7, 200, 000 being the 2023 projected population of Akwa Ibom State from the 2006 National Population Commission figure. Findings from the study revealed that exposure of citizens to political campaigns in the media during the 2023 general elections in Akwa Ibom State was very high (83%). The media frames of the political campaigns of Labour Party (LP) in the 2023 elections appealed most to the citizens of Akwa Ibom State scoring 82% on weighted mean scale. The study then concluded that media frames of political campaigns do have influence on voting behaviour of citizens during elections. It recommended that given the influence of media frames on citizens' understanding and interpretations of political campaigns, media framing of political parties and their programmes should be based on verifiable facts and feasibility of the political agenda.

Key words: Campaigns, Citizens, Framing, Media, Mobilisation

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INTRODUCTION

The extent to which the mass media dedicate time and space to report, analyse and give coverage to elections and indeed political campaigns in Nigeria has lent credence to the assertion that the media are at the heart of all political discourse. The extent of coverage given to political programmes and slanting of such coverage is known as framing. Framing of political campaigns refers to the specific ways that issues and personalities involved in electioneering are being presented in the media. According to Perloff (2014), politics is the battle for the frame, with different parties and actors attempting to influence the way issues are presented and highlighted. The mass media have mediated

politics and political campaigns in our modern democracy through consistent reportage and analysis of political issues and governance. Explaining the concept of mediatisation, Hjarvard (2013), notes that the media and politics have grown mutually interconnected in today's mediated society. According to Tsfati (2017), mediatisation of politics draws its importance from the politicians' conviction that news media impact both voters and other political actors and as such the media have the capacity to make or mar elections and political careers. Bassey *et al.* (2023) citing Ogba (2017) assert that in Nigeria, politics and political campaigns are easily promoted in the news media notably the newspapers, which are deemed

to be essential means of political mobilisation. Newspapers usually devote some pages of their publications to the coverage of political events during national, state or local government elections, publishing reports on rallies, parties' conventions, meetings, electioneering or political campaigns by aspirants, political parties' candidates and supporters. The mass media are indeed the centrepiece of today's political campaigns. Perloff (2014) posits that the media have replaced political parties as the tissue linking candidates and the electorate; communication among candidates, media and citizens is incredibly quicker with messages to and fro landing instantly on technological devices that would have been unimaginable two centuries ago.

Akpan and Bassey (2018) aver that as purveyors of information, the mass media have the responsibility of informing, educating and interpreting government policy to the public, paying attention to concerns of human development and the role expectations of citizens. Bassey (2020) maintains that "the active involvement of citizens in political affairs entails mobilization,"(p.144). Ejiofor (2007) posits that mobilisation creates an opportunity for community members to get involved in political parties, movements, interest groups, voting, rallies and discussions. Mobilisation therefore involves the sharing of information, creation of awareness and influencing of public opinion often facilitated by the mass media. The conveyance of messages that promote political socialisation of citizens, helping them to know their roles and place in the political process, assisting agitation by political interest groups on what should be the ideal practice and facilitating public legitimisation of policies that affect all in the performance of government business is tagged political communication (Asemah *et al.*, 2017). The mass media are veritable tools of political communication used to promote participation of citizens in democratic governance through voters' education, discussion on the protection of human rights, promotion of tolerance among various socio-political groups and exposure of malfeasance in governance (Bassey *et al.*, 2023). The above functions of the mass media in politics and governance are often discharged creditably through media framing. Madaki and Jakanda (2022) assert that the mass media in their day-to-day practice create frames that can serve as a prism through which the audience understand issues and events as they happen in the society. It is against this backdrop that this study examined media framing of political campaigns and citizens' mobilization for 2023 general elections in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

During elections and electioneering, political parties and their candidates try to market their programmes before the electorate. Their campaign messages are often seen on billboards, movable vehicles and various social media platforms; heard on radio and television; published in newspapers, magazines, brochures, and also printed on handbills, flyers, banners, leaflets and booklets. "It is believed that the electorate select their preferred representatives in an election based on available information on the credibility of the candidates and their programmes," (Bassey, 2021, p.206).

Oftentimes, the mass media influence public opinion and also serve as the mirrors through which the citizens assess the programmes of each political party and its candidates for various elective offices. Tankard (2008) notes that the news media can set a tone for an event or issue by the choice of frames, hence frames are patterns of interpretation and presentation of issues in the media. From the foregoing, it is logical to conjecture that framing of political campaigns can ginger citizens' participation in the 2023 general elections in Akwa Ibom State. Hence the question: Did the media framing of the political campaigns in the 2023 elections influence the voting behaviour of the citizens in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The following research objectives guided the study:

- (i) To ascertain the extent to which the citizens were exposed to political campaigns in the media during the 2023 elections in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria.
- (ii) To find out the extent to which citizens recognised major media frames of the political campaigns in the 2023 elections in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria.
- (iii) To determine what media frames of the political campaigns appeal to the citizens most in the 2023 elections in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria.
- (iv) To ascertain whether media frames of the political campaigns in the 2023 elections did influence the voting behaviour of the citizens in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The mass media are channels of communication that are capable of reaching wide and heterogeneous audience simultaneously with information about issues and new ideas. Udomisor and Bwala (2010) posit

that the mass media play prominent roles in the society because of their capacity to inform, educate, entertain and enlighten the citizens. Dunu (2013) asserts that the mass media are capable of raising the consciousness of the people on issues of governance by enhancing informed participation in the political processes, facilitating and reinforcing more equitable and inclusive policies and actions. According to Bassey (2020), the mass media provide useful information on public events to all citizens and also bring the politicians and government closer to the electorate. "The mass media usually create strategic messages to reach select audiences. This involves the use of social marketing strategies to bring about a desired behavioural change. This brings to the fore the persuasive power of the media," (Bassey, 2021, p.57).

MEDIATISATION OF POLITICS

According to Dunu (2013), it is only when the media report, monitor, investigate and criticise the public administration's policies and actions as well as inform and educate the citizens can good governance be enthroned. Bassey (2021) explains that the concept of mediatisation focuses on how the mass media permeate the society, become intertwined with, and influence other fields or social institutions such as democracy, politics, economy and health. Mediatisation of politics refers to the influence that the media exert on politics. Lilleker (2006) explains that mediatisation is a theory which argues that the media shape and frame the processes and discourse of political communication as well as the society in which that communication takes place. According to Lilleker, the mediatisation of politics is part of the broader social trend - the mediatisation of society, meaning that what the public sees and hears in the mass media shapes the way it views the world and itself, and subsequently, how it acts. Bassey (2020a) asserts that "there is a critical link between the operation of the mass media and the citizens' participation in democratic governance because the mass media provide information and access to information gingers political participation," p.145.

Hjarvard (2013) argues that through the processes of mediatisation, political institutions and actors are increasingly influenced by the modus operandi of the media and as such we may consider the mediatisation of politics as a shift in the balance of power between two institutions, politics and the media, in favour of the latter. It is obvious that the mass media promote democracy by educating voters during elections, advocating human rights, promoting tolerance among various social groups and ensuring

that the government and its functionaries are transparent and accountable to the people (Bassey, 2020). Stromback and Esser (2014) aver that mediatisation of politics is the long-term process through which the importance of the media and their spill-over effects on political processes, institutions, organisations and actors has increased. According to them, mediatisation of politics refers to media influence on all politically relevant activities and processes that are influenced, altered, shaped or structured by the media and the perceived need of individuals, organisations, institutions and social systems to communicate with or through news media. They explain that the more important the news media have become as a source of information and as a channel of communication between political actors and the public, the more decisive has news logic become for both what the media cover and how they cover it, and the more important it has become for political actors, organisations and institutions to accommodate and adapt to the news media and media logic.

Takens *et al.* (2013) explain what constitute media logic in election campaign coverage to include: the degree to which news coverage was personalised; the degree of contest coverage and the degree of negative coverage. They explain further that contest coverage involves the framing of politics as a strategic game and news about conflict and cooperation. Regarding conflict frame, political news reportage is always replete with news on intra-party conflict and division during party primary and subsequent defections. Bassey and Iwok (2019) note that in Nigeria, political defection occurs so often that it has become a thing of mockery among the citizens. Defectors from one political party to another hinged their decision on the dwindling fortunes of the party caused by its leadership crisis, lack of internal democracy and political favouritism. At the build-up to 2023 elections in Nigeria, the former Vice Presidential candidate of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Mr. Peter Obi defected to Labour Party (LP) at the national level. At the Akwa Ibom State level, a PDP Senator vying for governorship, Mr. Bassey Albert Akpan was frustrated out of the party and he defected to Young Progressive Party (YPP) while Sen. Akpan James Udoedeghe was frustrated out of All Progressive Congress (APC) and he defected to New Nigerian People Party (NNPP) to pursue his governorship ambition in Akwa Ibom State.

News media logic in the coverage of politics presupposes adherence to professional ethics, commercial and technological needs and interests of the media rather than the needs and interests of

political institutions, organisations and actors. The degree to which news coverage is actively shaped by media logic is termed media interventionism or exercise of media's discretionary power (Stromback & Esser, 2014). The authors enumerate four dimensions of mediatisation of politics to include: the focus on how important news media as opposed to personal experiences or interpersonal communication, are as a source of information about politics and society; the second is how independent news media are from political institutions that is the structural differentiation of news media as an institution from political institutions. This involves norms that differentiate media and journalism from politics such as journalistic objectivity and neutrality. The third focus has to do with the degree to which media content and the coverage of politics and society is guided by media logic as opposed to political logic while the fourth dimension centres on the degree to which political institutions, organisations and actors are guided by media logic as opposed to political logic. From the foregoing, it is obvious that the mass media have played a great role in the exercise of political power through transformative influence on politics by molding and strengthening the legitimacy of political opinions and decisions. The politicians have more often than not adapted to the demands of the media through the ways they allocate more time, energy and resources to news management, media agenda building, stage management and other marketing and political public relations strategies and tactics, which could be termed self mediatisation or reflexive mediatisation (Stromback & Esser, 2014).

THE CONCEPT OF MEDIA FRAMING

Framing is mostly concerned with the specific ways that issues, institutions, events and persons involved in political campaigns are presented and highlighted in the mass media. Lilleker (2006) notes that framing is the practice of thinking about news items and story content within familiar contexts; and the media are instrumental to the creation of frames by which news items are predefined and narrowly contextualised. The author explains that frames are designed to enhance understanding and cognitive shortcuts to link stories to the bigger picture. According to Reese (2008), framing refers to the way events and issues are organised and made sense of, especially by media. He explains that framing is useful in understanding the media's role in political life. Tankard (2008) citing Gamson and Modigliani (1989), notes that one of the approaches to measuring media frames is called media package. He explains that media package presents the keywords

and common language that would help identify a particular frame in the reportage of events and issues.

Perloff (2014) describes frame as the central organizing theme employed to lend meaning to political events while framing involves selecting certain facets of issues and weaving connections so that particular interpretations and remedies are promoted. It is obvious that framing means the applicability of certain ways of thinking about the problem, calling attention to certain values and others. Framing does not so much concern the choice of issues the media decide to cover but the particular ways the issues are presented and highlighted. According to Perloff (2014), political elites harness frames when trying to define a particular problem in the society, canvassing for support among parliamentarians and stakeholders, hoping to pass a bill into law or appealing to voters during a political campaign. On the other hand, journalists use frames when they employ broad themes to structure factual details while citizens interpret political issues in terms of broad principles that help them structure and organise the political world. Framing is reputed to be at the hub of political discourse in today's mediatised society. Lilleker (2006) citing Entman (1991), notes that the news media are often replete with five popular frames such as: (i) conflict which focuses on disagreements, division often within political parties; (ii) human interest/personalisation which introduces emotions to news reporting, attaching human feelings to stories like individual victims of natural disasters, wars and humanitarian crises; (iii) consequences which entails economic implications of events or impacts and magnitude; (iv) morality which focuses on the indiscretions of political actors or alternatively, policies can be seen to be morally questionable; (v) responsibility which applies to politics and the game of politics ranging from conflict to news on politicians' private lives.

In a review of empirical studies, Perloff (2014) summarises the impacts of political media frames on individuals as follows: (i) media frames probably have a greater impact when the issue is new or novel. On many issues, people bring their own framework to the media and do not necessarily accept media or elite frames without resistance; (ii) frames do not usually change attitudes of strong partisans; (iii) framing has a stronger effect when the frame is consistent with the audience members' political values; (iv) a frame does not operate in a vacuum. Frames operate in a political arena characterised by multiple voices. When there is competition among frames, the effect of a particular frame may be reduced. Framing is also a multi-layered

concept. It can operate individually, on the micro-level, in terms of how citizens frame political issues. On the macro-level, political frames selected by journalists can influence citizens and policy-makers. Political elites also choose frames strategically, harnessing them to gain power, push issues and control policy-making process. According to Perloff (2014, p. 165), "power involves persuading political elites, media gatekeepers, and citizens to adopt one frame rather than another."

From the analysis above, political campaigns in the 2023 elections in Nigeria had media frames such as: economy, employment, education, security, agriculture, industrialization, restructuring of Nigeria, youth and women empowerment, energy and health infrastructure. Madaki and Jakanda (2022) posit that during elections, the mass media are the principal vehicles through the voters receive information concerning the political parties, their platforms, the voting process, the electoral commission and other issues germane to the exercise of their rights.

During the 2023 general elections, many political parties at the Federal and State levels came up with unique selling propositions in their electioneering. For example, the All Progressives Congress (APC) at the national level talked about *renewed hope* and the State Flag-bearer coined the slogan *shared prosperity*. The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) talked *unity, security and restoration of Nigeria* at the national level while the State standard bearer hinged his campaigns on *continuity of ARISE agenda* of his predecessor. The Labour Party (LP) at the national and state levels played up the issues of *prudence in management of economy, people-centred policies, encouragement of manufacturing and production sector, freshness of ideas as typified in Obidient Movement*. The New Nigerian Peoples Party (NNPP) at the state level talked about *wealth creation, food sufficiency and inclusive government* while Young Progressives Party (YPP) played up issues of *inclusiveness for youths and women, wealth creation and empowerment* at the state level. The mass media were ever-ready to amplify all these promises in different frames to the citizens. It is against this backdrop that this study examined the extent to which the media frames of the 2023 political campaigns appeal to the citizens in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopted the Agenda Setting Theory and Framing Theory for its framework. Baran and Davis (2012) posit that Agenda Setting Theory and Framing are often used together as a way of developing a comprehensive strategy for examining the production, dissemination and comprehension of new stories.

Under the Agenda Setting Theory, it is postulated that the mass media do more than just being the purveyor of information and that the mass media do not tell people what to think but what to think about. Baran and Davis (2012) note that it was Bernard Cohen's writing that formed the basis of the agenda-setting function of the mass media. Quoting McCombs and Shaw (1972), Baran and Davis (2012) explains that in the choice and display of news, editors, newsroom staff and broadcasters play important part in shaping political reality, adding that audience does not just learn about a given issue in the media but the importance it attaches to that issue depends on the amount of information given by the media. The implication of this is that the media set agenda for public discuss. Asemah (2011) posits that the theory presupposes that most of the pictures that we store in our heads, most of the things we think or bother about, are based on what we learnt from the mass media. Folarin (2000) explains that the theory implies that the mass media can determine what issues are regarded as important at a given time in a given society. He enumerated elements in the theory to include:

- (i) The quantity or frequency of reporting;
- (ii) Prominence given to the reports - through headline display, pictures and layout in newspapers, magazines, film, graphics, or timing on radio and television.
- (iii) The degree of conflict generated in the reports; and cumulative media-specific effects over time.

Anaeto *et al.* (2008) argue that the theory is good at explaining why people with similar media exposure place importance on the same issues. This brings into focus what Baran and Davis (2012) call the contemporary macro level articulation of the theory known as Agenda Building. They explain that agenda setting is primarily the micro level perspective of discussing the effect of the media and that agenda building is the collective process in which media, government and the citizenry reciprocally influence one another in the areas of public policy. In reporting the 2023 general elections the role of the media would be to move from the micro level of agenda setting to the stage of agenda building where the citizens would be exposed to the different parties, their candidates and programmes in order to understand and appreciate each party for decision making.

The Framing theory on the other hand deals with media contents and effects, how media messages are presented (media frames) and the resultant influence of the presentation on interpretation and perception by the audience (audience frames). In his

exposition on the theory, Oriola (2017) notes that Framing theory has become attractive to researchers in the area of political communication owing to its relevance in political discourse, which in turn determines behavior of citizens as voters in modern democracies. He argues that research attention on framing has been focused on electioneering activities such as political campaigns, election results, intra-party and inter-party relations, policy formation, voters' perception, opinions and reactions in the political process. Musa (2017) explains that news framing is like inserting a photo into a frame. Like photo frames, news frames have double effect; they can enhance or disfigure the news presentation. A news report that is placed in a distorted frame can affect the frame of mind of the media audience for better or for worse.

Sandig (2015) asserts that frames with capacity to motivate people towards a joint action have three-fold roles. According to him, these frames include identification of a problem and its source (diagnostic framing); the proffering of a solution to the problem and concrete action plan (prognostic framing) and the call for followers to join and sustain the protest (motivational framing). Baran and Davis (2012) observe that in Framing theory, people use sets of expectations to make sense of their social world and media contribute to those expectations. The mass media had the obligation to frame the 2023 political campaigns in order to mobilise the citizens for the elections. According to Ardevol-Abreu (2015), there is only a thin line between Agenda Setting and the Framing Theory. The Agenda Setting Theory is about the amount of attention given to an event by the media while Framing Theory entails the way a news item is described or represented.

METHOD OF STUDY

This study made use of the survey method of research, where questionnaire was used to collect information from the respondents in Akwa Ibom State. The population of this study was based on the National Population Commission census figure of 2006 as projected to 2023. The projected population stood at 7, 200, 000. The sample size for this study stood at 400.

SAMPLE SIZE/SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

To obtain the sample size for the study, the Taro Yamane sampling formula adapted by Akpan and Bassey (2018) was adopted to select the study sample from the population of 7, 200, 000 using the statistical formula below.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

$$1 + N(e)^2$$

Where n = the sample size

N = the given population

e = the level of significance or limit of tolerable error

1 = unit or a constant

The sample size of this study determined at 0.05 level of significance or tolerable limit of error is calculated thus:

$$\frac{7,200,000}{1 + 7,200,000(0.05)^2}$$

$$\frac{7,200,000}{1 + 7,200,000(0.0025)}$$

$$\frac{7,200,000}{1 + 18,000}$$

$$\frac{7,200,000}{18,001}$$

$$= 399.9 = 400$$

$$= 399.9 = 400$$

$$= 399.9 = 400$$

$$= 399.9 = 400$$

$$= 399.9 = 400$$

From the above calculations, a total of 400 respondents were drawn as the sample for the study. The study employed multi-stage sampling technique to select respondents from the three senatorial districts of Akwa Ibom North East (Uyo), Akwa Ibom North West (Ikot Ekpene) and Akwa Ibom South (Eket). The study applied purposive sampling technique since the study targeted media literate and politically conscious citizens. Many citizens are disillusioned with politics in Nigeria and do not bother whoever contests or wins elections because of failure of past governments leading to massive poverty, insecurity, ethnicity and corruption. Hence, it was advisable to target those who were politically active and exposed to the media during the electioneering. The state is made up of 31 local government areas with Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District having nine local government areas; Akwa Ibom North West Senatorial District has 10 local government areas and Akwa Ibom South Senatorial District has 12 local government areas. Using simple proportion, a total of 118 respondents representing 29.5% were polled in Akwa Ibom North East; a total of 127 respondents accounting for 31.7% were surveyed from Akwa Ibom North West while Akwa Ibom South hosting the largest number of local government areas had a total of 155 respondents representing 38.7% of the sample size. Politics in Nigeria is always fraught with ethnic and primordial sentiments, hence it was necessary to target the three Senatorial Districts to have views from the Ibibios, Annangs, Oron, Ekids,

Obolos and Itu Mbousos spread across the Senatorial Districts.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

This study employed the structured questionnaire for data collection. To ensure accurate response, 14 simple items divided into two sections were developed. Section A made up of items 1-5 deals with the bio-data of the respondents while section B made up of items 6-14 deals with the core issues which this study intended to interrogate. The section B of the instrument adopted the 5-point Likert Scale to obtain information. Three research assistants helped to administer the instrument on the respondents, each assigned to a senatorial district.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Data presentation was done and analysed in tables using simple percentages and weighted mean score (WMS) based on a five-point Likert Scale. The responses were weighted as follows:

- Strongly Agree (SA) = 5 points
- Agree (A) = 4 points
- Undecided (U) = 3 points
- Disagree (D) = 2 points
- Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1 point

From the computation, the WMS is 3.00 (5+4+3+2+1÷5). The mean score of 3.00 was used as the basis for decision on the responses to each item. Any mean score which is equal to or more than 3.00 is positive and accepted while any mean score that is less than 3.00 is tagged negative and is rejected. Out of the 400 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 392 were completed correctly and returned while eight copies could not be retrieved. The return rate was 98%. This formed the basis for computation.

FINDINGS

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 1: To ascertain the extent to which the citizens were exposed to political campaigns in the media during the 2023 elections in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria.

Table 1: Citizens' exposure to political campaigns in the media during 2023 elections in Akwa Ibom State

Item	Questionnaire statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total	N	WMS	Decision
6	I was highly exposed to political campaigns in the media during the 2023 elections in Akwa Ibom State.	980	496	84	56	16	1,632	392	4.16	Positive

Source: Field work (2023)

of 4.16 meaning that 83% of the citizens surveyed in this study were exposed to political campaigns in the media during the 2023 elections in Akwa Ibom State.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 2: To find out the extent to which citizens recognised major media frames of the political campaigns in the 2023 elections in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria.

Table 2: Recognition of major media frames of the political campaigns in the 2023 elections in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria

Items	Questionnaire statements	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total	N	WMS	Decision
7	At national level, the major campaigns in the media centred on Obidient movement (LP), Renewed Hope (APC), Security, Unity & Restoration (PDP)	1280	400	36	32	8	1,756	392	4.47	Positive
8	At the state level, the major campaigns in the media centred on Continuity of Arise Agenda (PDP), Wealth Creation & Food Sufficiency (NNPP), Inclusive politics & Empowerment (YPP), Shared Prosperity (APC)	880	576	84	64	12	1,616	392	4.12	Positive

Source: Field work (2023)

The data in Table 2 above show a high weighted mean score of 4.47 (89%) on the citizens' rating of the media frames of political campaigns of the three leading political parties of LP, APC and PDP at the national level in 2023 elections. The citizens' rating of the media frames of political campaigns of the four major political parties of PDP, NNPP, YPP and APC at the state level stood at the weighted mean score of 4.12 (82%).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 3: To determine what media frames of the political campaigns appeal to the citizens most in the 2023 elections in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria.

Table 3: The media frames that appeal most to the citizens in the 2023 elections in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria

Items	Questionnaire Statements	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total	N	WMS	Decision
9	The media frames of LP campaigns at the national & state levels appeal to me more.	1040	384	96	72	20	1,612	392	4.1	Positive
10	The media frames of APC campaigns at national & state levels appeal to me more.	480	416	240	176	24	1,336	392	3.4	Positive

Items	Questionnaire Statements	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total	N	WMS	Decision
9	The media frames of LP campaigns at the national & state levels appeal to me more.	1040	384	96	72	20	1,612	392	4.1	Positive
10	The media frames of APC campaigns at national & state levels appeal to me more.	480	416	240	176	24	1,336	392	3.4	Positive
11	The media frames of PDP campaigns at national & state levels appeal to me more.	680	624	108	64	32	1,508	392	3.84	Positive
12	The media frames of NNPP campaigns at the national & state levels appeal to me more.	300	250	192	108	32	882	392	2.25	Negative
13	The media frames of YPP campaigns at the national & state levels appeal to me more.	385	240	120	64	24	833	392	2.13	Negative

Source: Field work (2023)

The information in Table 3 above reveals that media frames of LP campaigns at the national and state levels appealed to the citizens at the positive weighted mean score of 4.1 (82%); APC campaigns at the national level and state levels scored weighted mean score of 3.4 (68%) while PDP at the national and state levels had a weighted mean score of 3.84 (76.8%). The NNPP at the national and state levels had a weighted mean score of 2.25 (45%) and the YPP at the national and state levels scored 2.13 (42.6%)

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 4: To ascertain whether media frames of the political campaigns in the 2023 elections did influence the voting behaviour of the citizens in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria.

Table 4: Influence of media frames of political campaigns on citizens' voting behaviour in the 2023 elections in Akwalbom State

Items	Questionnaire statements	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total	N	WMS	Decision
14	The media frames of political campaigns influenced my voting behaviour in 2023 elections in Akwa Ibom State.	800	432	108	112	32	1,484	392	3.78	Positive

Source: Field work (2023)

The data presented in table 4 above show a positive total weighted mean score of 3.78 (75.6%) on the level of influence that media framing of political campaigns had on the citizens' voting behaviour during the 2023 elections in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study set out to investigate the correlation between media framing of political campaigns and citizens' mobilization for the 2023 general elections in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. Findings of the study were

discussed based on the research objectives raised. The first objective sought to establish the extent to which citizens in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria were exposed to political campaigns in the media during the 2023 general elections. From the data computed on Table 1 above, the result shows a positive weighted mean score of 4.16 meaning that 83% of the citizens surveyed in this study were exposed to political campaigns in the media during the 2023 elections in Akwa Ibom State. The implication of this finding is that the exposure of citizens to political campaigns in the media during the election period was very high. It also shows high level of media literacy among the citizens. This finding confirms earlier works by Asemah *et al.* (2017), Curran (2005), and Udoakah (2001) that in a democratic society, citizens rely on the mass media for political news, information and proper understanding of democracy.

The second objective of this study was to ascertain the extent to which the citizens recognised major media frames of the political campaigns in the 2023 elections in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. The data in Table 2 above show a high weighted mean score of 4.47 (89%) on the citizens' rating of the media frames of political campaigns of the three leading political parties of LP, APC and PDP at the national level in 2023 elections. The implication of the data is that citizens recognized and understood the messages sent out on the *Obidient* mantra of LP, *Renewed Hope* slogan of APC and the *operation restore Nigeria* back to greatness as canvassed by PDP. At the state level, the citizens' rating of the media frames of political campaigns of the four major political parties of PDP, NNPP, YPP and APC at the state level stood at the weighted mean score of 4.12 (82%). The major frames in the media concerning the 2023 elections at the state level were issues of shared prosperity canvassed by APC gubernatorial candidate, wealth creation and food sufficiency played up by NNPP candidate; inclusive politics and citizens empowerment canvassed by YPP and the continuation of *ARISE Agenda* by PDP. This high weighted mean score implies that the citizens were politically conscious to interpret the messages of the different political parties. The highlight of these frames by the media aid the audience to understand the importance of the issues raised in the electioneering. This finding justifies the application of Agenda Setting and Framing Theories to this study.

The third objective centres on which media frames of the political campaigns in the 2023 elections appealed most to the citizens in Akwa Ibom State. The information in Table 3 above reveals that media frames of LP campaigns at the national and state levels

appealed to the citizens at the positive weighted mean score of 4.1 (82%); APC campaigns at the national level and state levels scored weighted mean score of 3.4 (68%) while PDP at the national and state levels had a weighted mean score of 3.84 (76.8%). The NNPP at the national and state levels had a negative weighted mean score of 2.25 (45%) and the YPP at the national and state levels scored a negative weighted mean score of 2.13 (42.6%). The implication of this finding is that LP media frames of the political campaigns in the 2023 elections appealed most to the citizens of Akwa Ibom State. This finding corroborates Nwosu and Orji-Egwu (2023) that the LP Presidential Candidate was very popular among the citizens because of his young age compared to others and the influence of citizen journalism.

The fourth objective of this study deals with the influence of media frames of political campaigns on the voting behaviour of citizens in Akwa Ibom State during the 2023 general elections. From the computation from Table 4, the finding shows a positive total weighted mean score of 3.78 (75.6%) on the level of influence that media framing of political campaigns had on the citizens' voting behaviour during the 2023 elections in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. The implication of this finding is that media frames have influence on voting behaviour of citizens during elections. This result corroborates Ogbidi *et al.* (2016) that there is a significant relationship between advertising and voters' behaviour in the electioneering process. The finding also supports Bassey (2020a) that there is a correlation between the functioning of the mass media and citizens' participation in democratic governance.

Conclusion

Based on the data, the analysis and the discussion of the findings of this study, the following inferences are drawn. The exposure of citizens to political campaigns in the media during the 2023 general elections in Akwa Ibom State was very high (83%). The recognition and understanding of media frames of political campaigns among citizens in the 2023 elections in Akwa Ibom State was very high standing at 89% and 82% respectively. The media frames of the political campaigns of Labour Party (LP) in the 2023 elections appealed most to the citizens of Akwa Ibom State recording 82% on weighted mean score. Media frames of political campaigns do have influence on voting behaviour of citizens during elections. Therefore, there is a positive association between media framing of political campaigns and voting behaviour of citizens during elections. Framing of political campaigns in the mass media based on facts, integrity of the politicians and viability of the programmes of political parties can go a long way to deepen democracy in Nigeria and

enhance citizens' participation in politics and future elections.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Given the influence of media frames on citizens' understanding and interpretations of political campaigns, media framing of political parties and their programmes should be based on verifiable facts and feasibility of the political agenda.
2. The media should serve as independent monitors of the political process in order to prevent political parties and their candidates from misleading the electorate in their political campaigns.
3. The media should strictly adhere to news media logic in the coverage of politics which presupposes adherence to professional ethics, commercial and technological needs and interests of the media rather than the needs and interests of political institutions, organisations and actors.
4. Political parties that have viable programmes for the enhancement of citizens' welfare should exploit the potency of media frames to grab power in order to bring about good governance in Nigeria.

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