

VOTERS' PERCEPTION OF MEDIA ENLIGHTENMENT CAMPAIGNS AGAINST VOTE-BUYING DURING THE 2022 GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION IN OSUN STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study evaluated the voters' perception of media enlightenment campaigns against vote-buying during the 2022 Gubernatorial election in Osun State, Nigeria. The importance of the media in curbing the menace of vote-buying in Nigeria cannot be over-emphasised, however, from the literature reviewed, there was no evidence that a study investigated the perception of voters to media enlightenment campaigns against vote-buying in Nigeria, also, previous studies on media enlightenment campaigns against vote-buying adopted quantitative studies, hence, this study rely on qualitative data and the study was carried out to fill these gaps. Data were collected from voters in Osogbo through in-depth interviews and analyzed thematically. Findings revealed that there is a high rate of exposure to media enlightenment campaigns by the voters. Furthermore, the study found that media enlightenment campaigns against vote-buying did not have any positive influence on voters because many of them still sell their votes during the election. The study also established that voters have different perceptions of vote-buying; some felt that it is wrong to sell their votes during elections while others did not see any wrong with it. Thus, the study recommended among others that the media should sustain their public enlightenment programmes for the electorates to enhance their exposure to the menace of vote-buying during elections and the different media houses should introduce different strategies that will enhance the effectiveness of the media in enlightening and sensitizing the electorates to positively change their perception on vote-buying.

Introduction

The mass media plays a major role in how society functions. They serve as avenues for the communication of information from a single source to a sizable, scattered, and multifaceted audience. According to Nwosu (1996), referenced in Afamuefuna (2007), "mass media" refers to the means of delivering messages through distance or time. Due to the media's significance in society, a large, scattered, diverse, and anonymous audience can interact simultaneously. Most people only rely on the mainstream media for their news, yet online media has transformed both the production of media and the audience's ability to access it. The main purpose of media is to give society a forum for information, education, and entertainment.

Elections are one of the key elements of democracy since they give eligible citizens the chance to vote and be elected. It serves as a tool for changing things or establishing new regimes. Elections are the main foundations that support and stabilise all democratic institutions, serving as the backbone of democracy. The election is a fundamental pillar that

grants citizens the ability to rule and run for public office to take charge of and control state affairs and resources, as noted by Baidoo, Dankwa, and Eshun (2018). The Clifford Constitution was in place when the first general election in Nigeria was held in 1923. This election signaled the start of a new era in Nigerian politics because it was the first occasion when citizens were able to take part in the democratic process and choose their leaders. June 12, 1993, Presidential Election was peaceful and credible in contrast to earlier elections that were tainted by widespread fraud, bloodshed, and intimidation. The presidential election was deemed to be the freest and most impartial in Nigerian electoral history.

Statement of the Problem

The current state of our election in Nigeria has left so much to be desired, evidence shows that the recent elections held in Nigeria is been characterized by election malpractices which include snatching of ballot boxes and vote-buying. Omeoyekwule, Onyibe, and Yalumo (2022) opine that many democratic countries now break election laws to ensure effective representation because of their excessive ambition for riches and power. For many political communities around the world, it is a matter of life or death because politicians are eager to acquire governmental leadership positions for personal gain. According to Baidoo, Dankwa, and Eshun (2018), using money and tangible rewards to sway voters is vote-buying. Since democracy was restored in Nigeria in 1999, vote-buying has become a common practice that is used in both primary and general elections. The advantages of democracy are being compromised as a result of this democratic insubordination, and a price is being paid. In a political community that embraces vote buying, the interest of the electorate may not be represented.

However, despite the importance of the media in curbing the vote-buying in Nigeria, from the literature reviewed, there was no evidence that a study investigated the perception of voters to media enlightenment campaigns against vote-buying in Southwest, Nigeria, moreover, previous studies on media enlightenment campaigns against vote-buying adopted quantitative studies, Santas et al (2022), Leight et al (2020), Bahamonde & Canales (2022). Therefore, it has become imperative to investigate the perception of voters to media enlightenment campaigns against vote-buying in Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. What was the level of exposure of voters in Osun State to media enlightenment campaigns against vote-buying during the 2022 gubernatorial election?

2. What influence did media enlightenment campaigns have on voters' decision to participate in vote-buying during the Osun State 2022 gubernatorial election?
3. What were the perception of Osun State voters towards media enlightenment campaigns against vote buying during the 2022 gubernatorial election?

Review of Related Literature

Media Enlightenment Campaigns

One of the most important methods for people to connect in any culture is through communication. It is only through the use of communication that is realizable for individuals from diverse heterogeneous backgrounds to live together, which is the essence of society. In any given culture, the socialisation of its members involves communication. In this study, communication is defined as more than just the exchange of information; it also refers to the process of influencing beliefs, ideas, and perceptions as well as changing behaviour or attitudes. When it comes to information and education, the public views the media in high regard. According to McQuail (2010), whenever the media impact society, they also bring about change. Hence, communication has the potential to have a significant impact on how the general public perceives a range of life concerns.

Media education campaigns on vote buying can take any shape, including radio jingles, television advertisements, newscasts, Public Service Announcements, children's programming, and more. Knowing that people's sentiments towards the outlawing of vote-buying are influenced by how much airtime or space the media devote to stories about the Enlightenment campaign. As it were, people's opinions and perceptions regarding a range of topics in life are shaped by their high levels of media dependence and exposure.

To put it succinctly, the degree of media dependence is a crucial factor in explaining why audience members' opinions, emotions, or actions change. Ojo, Afam, and Mustapha (2020) believe that television has done a good job of fulfilling its legal obligation to inform voters about the risk of vote-buying during elections. However, their findings show that corruption, a breach of professional and ethical standards, as well as ownership influence, hinder the effectiveness of television as a platform for enlightenment campaigns against vote-buying during elections.

Vote-Buying and Election Process In Nigeria

The word vote is a nascent concept and was coined from the Latin word votum and old English word buy. Voting means to select, elect, support, and back. The idea of voting also includes the formal declaration of a person's preference. According to Dickson, Salihu,

and Danjuma (2020), buying refers to purchase, acquisition, bargaining, or contract. It also includes the act of receiving something in exchange for money. There is no established definition of vote buying. Many scholars tend to define it in various ways. Vote buying, according to Bello (2017), is the practice of bribing voters in exchange for their vote using cash or other valuables.

Uwamahoro (2018), viewed vote-buying as an isolated incident that encourages corruption throughout the entire political system. Vote-buying occurs when a political actor, who is the buyer, decides to pay for support rather than competing honestly for votes. It affects democratic mechanisms including appearance, legitimacy, and trustworthiness. Money politics and this idea go hand in hand. Mogaji & Musa (2022) see vote-buying as a reward offered to a person for casting a specific kind of vote. In an election, voters engage in a financial transaction whereby they sell their votes to the candidate who offers the highest price.

Vote-buying, however, is a topic that is becoming increasingly popular due to its growing global expansion. Khemani (2015) asserts that the evidence demonstrates that where politicians buy electoral support by targeted transfers, they are likely to barter it off against the delivery of broader public services that impoverished people rely on. A blow to free and fair elections has been dealt with by the diversity that votes buying has brought to elections across boundaries. The willingness of the electorates to engage in national elections declines, according to Carreras & Irepoglu's (2013) argument.

Vote-buying has gotten so bad in Nigeria that candidates for political office are now extending their inducements' tentacles to election officials, security agents, and even the media. This explains why the situation in Nigeria has raised concerns and sparked scholarly discussion. Nkwede & Abah (2019) opine that vote-buying appears to have taken centre stage in Nigeria's political process. They believe that voters exchange their votes for particular results that are significant to them. One in five Nigerians, particularly those living in rural areas, reportedly received a vote offer, according to Bratton, 2008, cited in Nkwede & Abah (2019). Nigerian politicians provide prizes in the form of cash, goods like rice, bread, salt, onions, and groundnut oil, as well as souvenirs like umbrellas, bags, and other priceless items. Olaito (2018) argues that the Nigerian election season can be compared to a time of giving and receiving, with a lot of commercial activity occurring during the day.

Nonetheless, many academics believe that there is a connection between vote-buying and the benefits of democracy. Vote buying and democratic dividends in Nigeria are significantly associated with Omeonyekwule, Onyibe, and Yalumo (2022). It also suggested

that in Nigeria, partisan allegiance and vote buying had a strong association. Ogbonna, Ufomba & Solomon (2022), claim that vote-buying in Nigeria is a lamentable phenomenon that bedevils both the electorates and the drive for democratisation. The dysfunctional civic processes that result in citizens misappropriating political priority are what lead to vote buying.

Similarly, Osimen & Uloh (2022) opined that vote-buying politics has a great setback on voting behaviour and democratic governance in Nigeria, they argue that vote-buying is consistent with the continued materialisation and commercialization of party politics in Nigeria wherein electioneering and partisan relations are framed in a manner that translates to economic exchange. Furthermore, Jimoh (2021) in his study on vote buying and its implication on democratic governance in Nigeria: A Study of Ondo State 2020 Governorship Election, the author found that vote-buying and issuance of material gifts to electorates during elections influenced the voting pattern and is rife among the downtrodden and therefore, pose a very big challenge to all stakeholders in Nigeria electoral system particularly (INEC). According to the study's findings, voters accept bribes even if they are aware of the harm electoral corruption can do to democracy. In a similar vein, Ejue & Etika (2018) assert that democracy is the best form of government and that we should safeguard it by rejecting vote buying, they opined this in their research of radio as a real instrument for educating the people about the implications of vote-buying and selling in Nigerian elections.

Similar to a traditional marketplace, politicians, political parties, and party representatives are the vote sellers, while prospective voters are the buyers. The market component that affects the value or price of a vote is the degree of politicians' desperation to win in a certain voting unit during an election. Only affluent people fight for political jobs since it is so expensive to run for office. The electoral authority tasked with overseeing and controlling the costs of candidates has not been active in carrying out this duty because no visible vote buyers and sellers in Nigeria have received the punishment associated with them in the 2022 Electoral Act. The 2022 Electoral Act, Article 121, A person who – (a) corruptly by himself or by any other person at any time after the date of an election has been announced, directly or indirectly gives or provides or pays money to or for any person to corruptly influence that person or any other person to vote or refrain from voting at such election, or on account of such person or any other person having voted or refrained from voting at such election, or (b) being a voter, corruptly accepts or takes money or any other inducement during any of the period stated in paragraph (a) of this section, commits an offence and is liable on conviction to a fine of N500,000 or 12 months imprisonment or both. Despite

(INEC's) stance on vote-buying, reports from the 2019 general election and the 2022 gubernatorial elections in Ekiti and Osun States show that the Electoral Act is rapidly becoming a common occurrence. The term "vote-buying" has become increasingly popular in academic and journalistic circles in Nigeria since the start of the Fourth Republic, and has played a significant role in recent elections.

It was widely reported that vote-buying took place during July 16, 2022, Osun State governorship election between members of the two major political parties, the All Progressives Congress (APC) and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). These two groups were charged with providing between ₦5,000 and ₦10,000 to each voter in nearly every polling unit in the state. Nigerian election politics are increasingly characterised by the impunity of vote-buying, as political parties compete with one another over the sums given to voters.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts two theories; the Social Responsibility theory and Political Economy approach as a basis for analysis. According to the social responsibility theory, the press must serve society by performing several crucial mass communication tasks. This theory which contends that freedom and responsibility are intertwined was employed in this study. It is used in this study to evaluate the media's social responsibility efforts to launch awareness campaigns against vote-buying in Nigeria. One of the agents of socialization is the media, this is because they bring about the necessary social transformation for a good impact on the planet, Eribo (2017).

Moreover, the media has played and continues to play a crucial part in the awareness-raising effort against vote-buying. The decrease in the prevalence of vote buying and selling during the July 16, 2022, gubernatorial election in Osun State State may be evidence that the mass media's campaign to raise awareness of the negative effects of vote buying is having the desired effect on our society, thereby justify the support for the use of social responsibility theory of the media in this study.

Dialectical materialism and the political economy approach have similarities. Dialectical materialism, in Marx's opinion, attaches significance to the social environment's material and economic conditions. It is predicated on the idea that people are often driven by economic needs. According to Ojo, Afam, and Mustapha (2020), because the poor are subjected to poverty, the rich dominate the country's economic strength and utilise it to sway the opinions of the general public when it comes to voting. Nkwede and Abah (2019) argued that it is therefore not surprising that political rivalry that is engaged to dominate state power

can generate significant heat and hostility and encourage extra-constitutional behaviour in the form of electoral malpractices. The importance of this theory to this study is that all electoral frauds, including vote-buying in Nigeria, have their roots in politicians' struggles to gain and control state authority and use it for their financial gain.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research method. The method used was an in-depth interview. A qualitative approach (in-depth interview) was chosen because it provided a comprehensive account of the phenomenon from the respondents.

Research Design

This study employed qualitative approach using in-depth interview, this method involves detailed and open ended discussion with participants.

Population of the Study

Population, according to Sambo (2005), is the collection of all elements, objects, or events that are relevant to a certain study. The population frame for this study consisted of accredited voters in Osogbo Local Government, Osun State. These individuals were chosen for the study because they cast ballots in the Osun state gubernatorial election in 2022. As a result, they offered pertinent data on media initiatives to educate the public about vote-buying, which was used to address the research objectives posed in this study. Since there are 56,020 frames in total, there are 56,020 frames in this study.

Sample Size

For this study that used in-depth interviews, fifteen participants were selected from Osogbo Local Government to gain in-depth knowledge of the experiences of voters. They have participated in previous elections and exposed to vote-buying. Kadiri (2015) opines that the number of informants is irrelevant as long as the researcher reaches the saturation point in the interrogation. The rule in this type of research is the persistent need to attain saturation which is important in conducting qualitative research.

Research Instrument

This study used one on one interviews to get quality information from each informant. The interview questions were designed as open-ended questions. The process enabled the informants to ventilate their ideas, and share their experiences, using the mode of expression they know how to use best (Seidman, 2012).

Data Presentation and Analysis

Fifteen informants were interviewed within Osogbo metropolis. Eight males and seven females.

Theme 1: Exposure To Media Enlightenment Campaigns Against Vote-Buying

Voter exposure to media education campaigns on vote buying is a fundamental responsibility demanded of any serious medium; it is a way of sensitising the electorate to the dos and don'ts before, during, and after the election. Most of the informants explained that they were exposed to different media campaigns against vote buying on different radio and television stations around them. Different programs were dedicated by media houses to educate the electorates about the dangers attached to vote buying.

Media enlightenment campaigns are a way to sensitize people about the election, and whom to vote for. Media are enlightening people against vote-buying both on Television and Radio. It depends on the acceptability of the people they are enlightening, Informants 2, 4, 5,7,11,12, 14. Many people are exposed to media campaigns against vote buying through different adverts sponsored by some Non-Governmental Organisations, encouraging people not to sell their future and their votes, it is a commendable exercise, Informant 1.

Theme 2: Influence of Media Enlightenment Campaigns on Voters' Decision to participate in Vote-Buying

Media enlightenment campaigns did not influence to a great extent the decision of voters on whom to vote for, Informant 3, 8, 13. Informant 4 opines that "You know that media has a way of setting agenda for the society, the constant programmes on radio and television stations against vote buying kept on ringing on my ears when I was asked to sell my vote and I decline, I did not sell my vote". According to informant 3, she believes that due to the level of poverty in the society and corruption on the side of the leaders, media enlightenment campaigns against vote buying had a negative influence on the voters because many voters sold their votes during Osun State gubernatorial election,..in my polling unit, voters were asked to snap their ballot papers as an evidence to claim the money after the election. Few people have been influenced by media enlightenment campaigns against vote buying. Informant 7, explains that the media influenced her decision to vote buying because many radio stations during Osun 2022 Gubernatorial election spoke against voters selling their votes. "Despite all the messages coming from media against vote buying many people still sold their votes for money," Informant 15. It is a fact that the media is setting the agenda for the masses

and encouraging people on what to do according to Informant 9, she opines that no matter any media campaign against vote buying, voters that will collect money will still collect but the media should keep on speaking against vote buying, it can only be reduced, it cannot be eradicated in present Nigeria due to corruption and non-performance of our elected leaders.

Theme 3: Perception of Osun State Electorate on Media Enlightenment Campaigns against Vote Buying during the 2022 Gubernatorial Election

Voters have different perceptions to vote buying during the election. Some of them see nothing wrong in selling their votes while others condemn the act in its entirety. Informant 12, opines that the money given by politicians to voters is too little which cannot buy a bag of rice, she opines that the money is not compensation to the electorates because if a voter sells his or her vote, the person will suffer for it for the next four years.

The above statement shows the level of decadence in Nigeria, many people believe that there is nothing like vote buying as they see government money as something that belongs to all of them. It is a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the marrow of Nigeria's citizenry. There are collaborations to the above informants' perceptions, according to informant 15 "There are some people that have been influenced not to sell their vote, whereas there are some who are catching fun, seeing it as a national cake, let me just take my own, this is the one I can get, let me take it. I know that there is a lot of anger in the land, if the anger did not translate to Nigerians getting it right now, there might be no difference, more so, there is a cash crunch in the land".

Informant 4 corroborated the opinion of Informant 15 that "there is corruption in our society which makes citizens sell their votes during the election. Everybody in Nigeria is corrupt. Furthermore, in a contrary opinion, informant 3 believed that although many voters wanted to sell their votes during Osun State gubernatorial election, they were denied of this because police officers on duty forbid vote-buying and selling in my polling unit.

Discussion of Findings

This study evaluated voters' perception of the media enlightenment campaign against vote-buying during the Osun State 2022 gubernatorial election. The first objective sought to establish the level of exposure to media enlightenment campaigns against vote-buying during the Osun State 2022 Gubernatorial election. Based on the data obtained, it is evident that voters' level of exposure to media enlightenment campaigns on vote buying is high. The findings agree with the result of Abdulai, Ibrahim & Mashoud (2020) which state that society relies on the media for information before and during elections to make informed decisions as

well as sets agendas for the electorates on issues they consider important during elections. In the entire election process, the media plays an important role.

Similarly, the second objective of this study sought to examine the influence of media enlightenment campaigns on voters' decision to participate in vote-buying during the 2022 Osun State gubernatorial election. The findings to a large extent show that media did not have a high influence on voters' decision against vote buying through different sensitization programmes aired on media houses. This finding is not in agreement with the agenda-setting theory of the mass media which says that mass media indirectly determine what issues are important in society through the prominence they accord to the different issues that make up the editorial content of newspapers and broadcast media.

In addition, the study found that the perception of the informants to media enlightenment campaigns against vote buying during the Osun State 2022 Gubernatorial election was negative. Most of the informants thought that the collection of money before voting for a particular candidate is not wrong, this shows that the media campaign against vote-buying was less effective. This is consistent with findings in a study by Galadima (2019) on the assessment of newspaper coverage of the 2018 voter registration exercise which indicates that Nigerian newspapers' coverage of the exercise was low and less effective.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the voters' perception of media enlightenment campaigns against vote-buying during the Osun State 2022 Gubernatorial election. Because media campaigns heavily influenced voters' choices during the election, the researchers' findings showed that there was a significant amount of exposure to media enlightenment efforts before and during the election. The research revealed that social media, radio, and television were the primary means through which the voters obtained information on vote buying. Similarly, respondents agreed that media campaigns influenced the electorates' decision not to participate in vote selling. However, the audience's perception of media campaigns was less effective in the exercise. Based on these findings, the study concluded that electorates were exposed to media enlightenment campaigns, but their perception of the media campaigns before and during voting in the 2018 gubernatorial election in Osun State was less effective. Based on the findings from the results of the analysis and the conclusion drawn, the study recommended as follows:

1. The media should sustain their public enlightenment and sensitisation programmes for the electorates to enhance their exposure to the menace of vote-buying during elections.

2. The media should be redesigned and restructured their communication strategies in a manner that radio, television, social media, opinion leaders, and Non-Governmental Agencies will be effectively utilised in mobilizing the electorates not to participate in future election malpractice exercises.
3. The different media houses should introduce different strategies that will enhance the effectiveness of the media in enlightening and sensitising the electorates to positively change their perception of the influence of media campaigns against vote-buying. Mass media should consistently campaign against vote buying in Nigeria until the menace is curbed.
4. Voters should report any form of inducement to the appropriate agencies or authorities to ensure that they are punished, if they do so, it will go a long way to stem the plague.
5. Further studies on this study should be conducted using mixed methods and enlarge the scope of the study.

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