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Assessment of the Influence of Mass Media on Credible Conduct of 2023 Elections by the Electorate in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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Abstract
This study examined how the electorate in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria assessed the extent of mass media influence on the credible conduct of 2023 general elections. The study adopted the survey research design and sampled 400 respondents from the 2, 357, 418 voters registered by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Akwa Ibom State for the elections. The objectives of the study included: to find out the extent to which the mass media harped on salient issues of credibility in election conduct during the 2023 elections; to ascertain whether mass media reportage of the election process had built confidence in the electorate to participate in the exercise. This study was anchored on the Agenda Setting Theory and the Framing Theory of Mass Communication. Data analysed showed that the mass media coverage of the 2023 elections in Akwa Ibom State as perceived by the electorate stood at 63.8%. Finding shows that 67.2% of the respondents agreed that the mass media had placed on the front burner the thorny issue of election credibility during the 2023 general elections. The study concluded that the voting behaviour of electorate and the outcome of the 2023 elections did not correlate with mass media reportage of the exercise as perceived by the electorate. It therefore recommended that the electoral umpire and the mass media should undertake aggressive political advertising to raise the consciousness of the electorate beyond pecuniary and primordial sentiments in order to achieve credible conduct of elections in Nigeria.

Keywords: Assessment, Credibility, Elections, Electorate, Mass Media

Introduction

The mass media are indispensable tools of political communication that facilitate citizens' participation in democratic governance. The mass media play crucial role in voters' education, discussion on the protection of human rights and exposure of malfeasance in governance (Bassey, Jacob & Ngonso, 2023). Dunu (2013) notes 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. Under the mediatisation concept, "the mass media permeate the society, become intertwined with, and influence other fields or social institutions, such as democracy, politics, economy and health (Bassey, 2021, p. 56). The mass media have influenced politics and vice versa. This is because besides media laws enacted by parliament (politics) to regulate media operations, both the mass media and the political players need one another to reach audiences whom politicians see as their supporters and possible voters, and whom the mass media at the same time see as consumers of their offerings. Corroborating the above assertion, McQuail (2010, p.523) notes that "there has always been an intimate connection between mass communication and the

conduct of politics, in whatever kind of regime." Thus, globally, politicians and electoral umpires spend a lot of money on media campaigns involving, among others, television and radio interviews, jingles, public relations-driven articles, documentaries, advertisement in newspapers, posters, flyers, billboards and social media during electioneering. This action is informed by the fact that the politicians see the mass media as strong and veritable channels through which they can reach their potential supporters and also influence their voting behaviour in their favour.

Generally, especially in highly literate societies, citizens learn much about politics from the mass media (Bergan, Gerber & Karian, 2009). It is also through the mass media that the citizens voice their concerns to politicians, making the relationship between the mass media and the politicians a symbiotic one. Preparations for elections, announcement of results and allied matters are conveyed to the larger society primarily through the mass media.Elections in Nigeria date back to the colonial days. The first general ballot in the country was held on 20th September, 1923 (*Nigeria: Reports for 1923,* cited in *Wikipedia,* retrieved 19 August, 2024). Thereafter, general elections were again held in 1928, 1933 and 1938 (*Wikipedia*). In 1960, the Federal Electoral Commission (FEC) was set up and the body conducted the regional and national elections of 1964 and 1965. The military coup of 1966 halted elections in the country. In 1978, however, a new electoral umpire, Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) was established to conduct the 1979 polls that brought the Second Republic under Shehu Shagari into office. It also conducted the 1983 Elections which gave Shagari his short-lived second term.

The Gen. Muhammadu Buhari military government that supplanted the Shagari administration was displaced by the Gen. Ibrahim Babangida stratocracy. The latter conducted the June 12, 1993 presidential election that it also aborted. The Gen. Sani Abacha junta took over the reins of power in 1993 and in December 1995 set up the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON), which conducted national and local government elections. Those who emerged from the process were not inaugurated when General Abacha died in June 1998. General Abdulsalami Abubakar, who succeeded Abacha dissolved NECON and set up the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), which conducted elections which ushered in the Fourth Republic on 29 May, 1999 (www.inecnigeria.org.).Since 1999, when the country returned to civil rule, general elections have been held in 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019, and 2023. According to Mavis and Patrick (2022), most of the elections were riddled with accusations and counter-accusations of malpractices before, during, and after the polls. The 2023 polls offered much hope because of the introduction of BVAS technology by INEC, but then, the same lack of transparency and responsibility in Nigeria's elections showed up, leading to the results of the many, if not most of the elections being contested in the courts, which on many occasions delivered controversial verdicts, leaving some to say that the courts were merely delivering judgments, and not justice.

All the while, the media were reporting and analysing the polls. However, did the media consciously and deliberately mobilise electoral structures, polling officials and Nigerians in general, to work for credible elections? If they did, did the electorate see that to be the case? This and other concerns formed the background of this study.

Statement of the Problem

Bassey (2020) asserts that elections and electioneering entail the struggle to grab power. There are always divergent views as each participant or political party devises means of outsmarting the other in the political race. It therefore becomes incumbent upon the mass media to remain detached to enhance the credibility of the exercise. The electorate need the mass media to make informed

decision in their voting since part of the responsibility of the media is to inform and educate and an informed electorate can be mobilised to enthrone credible election (Hasan, 2010). To win elections, politicians have to persuade the people to vote them based primarily on their manifestoes (Obeta, Ekuma, Elejene & Murtala, 2021). This is usually achieved through political campaigns and citizens mobilisation done through the mass media. The 2023 election in Nigeria, the seventh successful one since 1999, was held on February 25, 2023 for the presidential and National Assembly candidates and on March 11, 2023, the governorship and Houses of Assembly candidates took their turn. Besides low voter turnout, the elections were marred by irregularities. Of the 93 million registered voters, according the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), only a little above 25 million voters participated in the election (*The Conversation*, March 16, 2023). Part of the reason for this low turnout was low voter confidence in the electoral process – credibility issues, as captured in the 'First Preliminary Report' of the European Union Election Observation Mission (EUEOM) issued on 25 February, 2023, partly thus:

> On 25 February, Nigerians went to the polls in highly anticipated presidential and National Assembly elections that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) kept on schedule despite a volatile and challenging environment. Fundamental freedoms of assembly and movement were largely respected, yet the full enjoyment of the latter was impeded by insufficient planning, insecurity and the prevailing Naira and fuel shortages. Abuse of incumbency by various political office holders distorted the playing field and there were widespread allegations of vote buying. Media provided an extensive coverage of the three leading campaigns while disinformation interfered with voters' right to make an informed choice on election day....

In their final report on the election, EUEOM in its executive summary, stated,

> The 2023 general elections did not ensure a well-run transparent, and inclusive democratic process as assured by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Public confidence and trust in INEC were severely damaged during the presidential poll and was not restored in state level elections, leading civil society to call for an independent audit of the entire process.
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> - *European Union Election Observation Mission Nigeria 2023 Final ReportGeneral Elections 25 February and 18 March 2023,* p.7). (Retrieved from www.eusdgn.org/european-union-election-observation-nigeria, on 25 August, 2024).

The General Abdulsalami Abubakar-led National Peace Committee (NPC), which also made contributions towards making the polls a hitch-free one, unveiled to the public its report on 16th February, 2024. Part of the observations of the NPC on the election was:

> Significant lack of compliance with electoral legal frameworks, guidelines and policies; a widespread trust deficit in government agencies and institutions responsible for managing elections; limited political awareness among citizens regarding electoral laws, process, policies, and guidelines; challenges associated with the technology adopted to enhance transparency and integrity in the electoral process; the impact of poverty and dispossession on credible elections.
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> - *www.middlebelttimes.com* (visited 24 August, 2024.

Among recommendations made by the NPC to strengthen the electoral process in the country were that the government in power complies with, and implements the social contracts it has signed

with Nigerians, and that the political party management system be made "participatory, inclusive, transparent, and value driven" *www.middlebelttimes.com*.

It could be safelysaid that the observations made by the EUEOMand the NPC, respectively, indicate their conviction that there was little credibility in the 2023 Nigerian general ballot. This corroborates the observation of Ochonogor and Omego (2012, p.331), "Nigeria has not been lucky to have free and fair elections." Mavis and Patrick (2022) assert that polls in Nigeria have been marred by electoral malpractices such as rigging, frauds, stealing of electoral materials and even violence. But could these have been observations made by just a few biased groups, or were those observations reflective of the perception of Akwa Ibom State electorate on the credibility of the 2023 polls as well? Did the mass media coverage of the 2023 polls engender credibility?Given the various reports by local and foreign observer teams to the elections that pointed out serious issues of credibility that befell the polls, the question this study sought to answer was:Did Akwa Ibom State electorate perceive the media coverage of the 2023 general election as promoting its credibility?

Objectives of the Study:

These were to:

1. determine the extent to which the mass media gave coverage to the 2023 elections as perceived by the electorate in Akwa Ibom State.
2. find out the extent to which the mass media harped on salient issues of credibility in election conduct during the 2023 elections.
3. ascertain whether mass media reportage of the election process built confidence in the electorate to participate in the exercise.
4. determine whether the Akwa Ibom State voters perceive the mass media coverage of the elections as influencing its outcomes.

Research Questions

1. How did Akwa Ibom State electorate perceive the media coverage of the 2023 general elections in Nigeria?
2. To what extent did the mass media harp on issues of credibility of the 2023 elections?
3. Did mass media coverage of the 2023 elections build confidence of the electorate to participate in the elections?
4. Did the electorate see mass media coverage of the 2023 elections as influencing the outcomes?

Literature Review

The mass media and democratic governance

Our modern society has come to depend on the media for much of what it knows about itself and outside world. Okon and Udoudo (2010, p.30) note that, "all functions performed in the political system, political socialisation and recruitment, interest articulation, interest aggregation, political communication, rule making, application and adjustment are all performed by means of communication." Dunu (2013, p. 187) observes that "it is 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."

As purveyors of information, the mass media play critical role in governance. Udoakah (2014) asserts that the media are as relevant to society as the executive, legislature and judiciary arms of government. The media owe the people, who are the only reason for their (the media) existence, a duty of information dissemination and enlightenment to enable them choose from an

informed position, which of the political offerings made by political actors are best for society. Given their agenda setting, framing, and status conferral roles, the media are generally believed to have the power to influence the direction of politics. The mass media act as the watchdogs of the society. Bassey (2016, p. 219) explains that "the press does the work of surveillance of environment through creative reportage of socio-economic and political events in the society." This is why political parties spend huge sums on media campaigns to woo voters and discredit their opponents in the hope that they would be sway the citizens to vote for their interests. Norris (2006) posits that the mass media play three key roles in democratisation and good governance, which include: maintaining the watchdog role over the powerful, promoting accountability, transparency and public scrutiny; serving as a civic forum for political debate, facilitating informed electoral choices; and acting as an agenda setter for policy makers, strengthening government responsiveness to social problems.

Bassey, Jacob and Ngonso (2023) assert that the mass media play vital role in creating democratic citizens' need to pay attention to problems of public affairs and governance and also keep their elected officials responsible in the business of governance. Tsfati (2017) says that 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 ability to make or mar elections and political career. Ogba (2017) says that in Nigeria, politics has found expression in the news media notably the newspapers, which are deemed to be essential means of political mobilisation. She emphasises that newspapers always dedicate some of their pages to the coverage of political events during national elections, publishing reports on rallies, party conventions, party meetings, campaigns by aspirants and candidates for various political posts.Udoudo and Bassey (2011) note that given the importance of the media during electioneering, every politician tries to curry favour from them but the journalists do not owe politicians any obligation rather the society, which needs the services of the journalists most.

Because of their role as mirrors of society, watchdogs, and moulders of opinion, the media should help voters make the right choice of which political party to vote for. The mass media promote democracy in all political climes. Olugbenga, Owolabi and O'neil (2014) note that the mass media through their various programmes, comprehensive and continuous reports, sensitises the citizens to the misconduct of their leaders as well as stimulates agitation for reforms that will create positive attitude change on the part of the public officers. Udoakah (2014, p.5) asserts that the mass media, "provide platforms for a variety of political viewpoints, judging and criticising the viewpoints in circulation." Among issues they should raise are the credibility of the electoral process, security emplaced to secure the electoral process, and screening personnel appointed to drive the electoral process, among others. The mass media can achieve this feat through their agenda setting function and proper framing of the issue of election credibility. This, if done conscientiously, might help the people vote right, and thereby enthrone credible elections. According to Ochonogor and Omego (2012), experts in media studies believe that modern politics is largely driven by media coverage. They posit that the media have the duty to enlighten the citizenry to enable it make informed choices by distinguishing facts from fiction amid the plethora of promises made by politicians from their hustlings.

The role of the media includes majorly making information available to the citizens. As Eyoh (2020, p.80) puts it, "The media ... pride themselves as mobilizers, educators, informers and agenda setters." This tallies with the position of Iredia (2007, p.12) that the people "must have all information that is needed to elect the right candidates, who can ensure good governance. Where such public awareness is lacking, those of us in the media must accept a share of the blame of

failed elections in Nigeria." While the media may not choose for the electorate, they should educate and mobilise the electorate to vote beyond immediate gratifications of money, appeals to ethnicity, religion, regionalism or some other primordial sentiments offered them by political actors. Beyond attending to the electorate, the media need to critically interrogate the electoral system and its minders. The foregoing raises questions of whether indeed the media influence voting behaviour. It is difficult to ascertain this, or even how that happens if at all. It is one thing to be exposed to media messages, but it is another for that to be said to have effect on the audience except they say so. But it does appear, as postulated by the media theory of agenda setting, that the more the media focus on an issue, the more likely such issue would be mainstreamed and influence the thinking of at least some of the audience members. Similarly, the way the media present political content – framing – could influence how audiences perceive such contents.

The Electoral Act and the Mass Media in Nigeria

The concept of elections implies a process by which a group of persons enthrone others they select to lead them. Beyond providing the necessary information to the people, the Nigerian media are empowered by Section 22 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) to hold government accountable to the people. Ochonogor and Omego (2012, p.331) explain that election is "a practical demonstration of a citizen's liberty and right to make political choice." This, however, applies to democratic societies. However, to be able to make state or national leadership choices, citizens should be politically savvy enough to know what choices are there for them to choose from. Making available political options known to the electorate falls within the ambit of the media. Bassey (2020) posits that the mass media play pivotal role in any election anywhere in the world. They are expected to mobilise the electorate sufficiently for the electoral process through adequate reportage and surveillance of the process to ensure acceptable outcome. The mass media are expected to be impartial in the reportage of election activities. The Electoral Act 2010 provides thus:

State apparatus including the media shall not be employed to the advantage or disadvantage of any political party or candidate at any election.

Media time shall be allocated equally among the political parties or candidates at similar hours of the day.

At any public electronic media, equal airtime shall be allotted to all political parties or candidates during prime times at similar hours each day, subject to the payment of appropriate fees.

At any public print media, equal coverage and conspicuity shall be allotted to all political parties.

A public media that contravenes subsection (3) and (4) of this section commits an offence and is liable on conviction to a fine of N500, 000 in the first instance and to a maximum fine N1,000, 000 for subsequent conviction.

Bassey (2020, p. 233) observes that the Electoral Act and other regulatory agencies like APCON and NBC codes make provisions to guide political broadcast to enhance the credibility of the electoral process and also ensure that the mass media maintain neutrality in the discharge of their professional responsibilities. The Code of the Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON, 2005) provides in Section 6 the following guidelines:

Equal Opportunity: Political candidates or parties must be given equal opportunity to buy space and /or airtime. "Equal opportunity" means that each competing candidate or party must

have equal access to comparable space and/or airtime, generally on the basis of first come, first served.

Compliance: Media houses, agencies, political parties, politicians and their agents must ensure that political advertisements are in consonance with the provisions of the Code. When in doubt, they should seek immediate clarification from the Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON).

Similarly, the Nigerian Broadcasting Code (NBC) 2016 provides the following under Section 5.3 titled Political News and Current Affairs Broadcast as well as Section 7.6 titled Political Advertising.

-5.3.3 provides that a broadcaster shall:

(a). carry out its civic responsibility of broadcasting all aspects of political enlightenment.

(b). avoid inflammatory and divisive matter in its provocative form in using political material for news.

(c). in adherence to the principles of pluralism, accord equal airtime to all political parties or views, with particular regard to the amount of time and belt during political campaign periods.

(d). regularly announce that every political party is entitled to equitable airtime during political campaign periods.

(e). ensure a political broadcast is in decent language.

(f). ensure a partisan political broadcast is one in which the political party seeks to explain only its manifesto and programmes.

(g). ensure that a political broadcast is clearly identified as such and not presented in a manner that would mislead the audience to believe that the programme is of any other type.

(h). ensure that at campaign periods, a Log Book is kept by an officer not below the level of a Controller or equivalent, showing the allocation of News Programmes and Commercial airtime to each political party with dates, titles and other information as may be requested by the Commission.

(i). ensure that a partisan political broadcast is recorded off air and preserved for at least 90 days after first broadcast.

(j). ensure that the broadcast of a partisan political campaign, jingle, announcement and any other form of partisan party identification or symbol ends not later twenty four hours before polling day.

(k). not use any vote obtained at different polling stations or from exit polls to project or speculate on the chances of the candidates.

5.3.7. a broadcaster shall implement the appropriate decisions, including the grant of a *Right of Reply or Apology* within 24 hours, and at the same level of prominence.

7.6.3 (a). A broadcaster shall not deny person or group a right of broadcast of a political advertisement.

(b). ensure that no advertisement is accepted in a partisan political programme.

(c). not permit any political campaign or advertisement on its facilities 24 hours preceding polling day or on polling day.

(d). give equal access to all registered political parties at similar hours of the day.

(e). allot airtime equitably among the political parties at similar hours of the day.

(f). allot equitable airtime to all political parties during prime times and at similar hours each day subject to the payment of appropriate fees.

(g). ensure equitable coverage of all political parties.

(h). not be employed or used to the advantage or disadvantage of any political party or candidate at any election.

(i). authenticate a purported withdrawal of a candidate in an election and ensure that the affected candidate personally endorses such claim.

The period of campaign through any broadcast media in any election by every political party shall commence 90 days before polling day and ends 24 hours prior to that day.

A broadcaster shall ensure that a political ad/ broadcast does not contain hate messages or speeches (jingles, campaigns and advertisements).

A broadcaster that contravenes the provisions of this Section shall be liable in first instance to a penalty of N500, 000 and N1,000,000 for subsequent breaches or revocation of licence.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that the mass media are veritable sources of campaign information during electioneering and the elections. The Electoral Act and the regulatory agencies have recognised this fact and have made the above provisions to guide political broadcast to enhance the credibility of the electoral process and the elections.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted the Agenda Setting Theory and the Framing Theory for its framework. The Agenda Setting Theory was propounded by McCombs and Shaw in 1972 and 1993. Its core idea is that "the news media indicate to the public what the main issues of the day are and this is reflected in what the public perceives as the main issues" (McQuail, 2010, p.512). Also that what the media repeatedly focus on – for instance, elections – tend to become what their audiences give added attention to. In their exposition of the theory, Baran and Davis (2012) explain that in the choice and display of news, editors, newsroom staff and broadcasters play important part in shaping political reality, adding that the 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. Folarin (2000) explains that theory implies that the mass media can determine what issues are regarded as important at a particular 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. The implication of this is that the media set agenda for public discuss. Baran and Davis (2012) note 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.

It has been noted that the mass media may not be successful in determining what the public actually thinks but it does determine successfully what the public should be thinking about. This theory is relevant to this study in the sense that the mass media often prioritise the issue of elections reportage given their constitutional roles in the electoral process. The Framing Theory, on the other hand, deals with media contents and effects, how media messages are presented and the consequential influence of the presentation on interpretation and perception by the audience

(Bassey & Iwok, 2019). McQuail (2010) cites Tuchman (1978) as saying that Erving Goffman (1974) is the proponent of this theory. Goffman is cited as having argued that a frame was needed to organise otherwise fragmentary pieces of information or experience (McQuail, 2010). With regards to news, this concept, according to McQuail, is related to terms like: terms of reference, context or news angle. 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 asserts 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 the distorted frame can affect the frame of mind of the media audience for better or for worse.

Entman (1993, p.52) notes that framing involves "selection and salience." For him, to frame, is to select,"Some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment, recommendation for the item described."The key premise here is that the media frame issues through presentation and placement strategies and the styles of presentation impact audience perception of the issues. In his explanation on the theory, Oriola (2017) observes that Framing theory has been relevant to scholars in the domain of political communication owing to its importance in political discourse, which in turn impacts conduct of individuals as voters in modern democracies. He says that study emphasis on framing has been concentrated on electioneering activities such as political campaigns, election outcomes, intra-party and inter-party interactions, policy creation, voters' perception, views and reactions in the political process. Musa (2017) notes that news framing is like fitting a photo into a frame. Like photo frames, news frames have twofold impact; they can improve or disfigure the news presentation. It is against this backdrop that Framing Theory becomes apt and relevant to this study.

Methodology

The study adopted the survey research design and sampled 384 respondents from a population of 2,357,418 being the total number of voters registered by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Akwa Ibom State for the 2023 elections. To obtain the sample for the study, Philip Meyer's sample size table as adapted by Bassey (2020) was used to select a sample of 384. Table 1 below presents Philip Meyer's sample table.

Table 1: Philip Meyer's Table for Sample Size

Population size	Sample
500, 000 or more	384
100, 000	383
50, 000	381
10, 000	370
5,000	357
3,000	341

2, 000	322
1, 000	248

Meyer's Sample Guide 2011

From the Table 1 above, a total of 384 respondents were polled for this study. The study employed the multi-stage sampling technique to select respondents from the three Senatorial District of the State. The State is made up of 31 local government areas with Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District and Akwa Ibom North West Senatorial District having nine (9) local government areas each while Akwa Ibom South has 13 local government areas. Using proportionate sample, a total of 111 respondents were surveyed from Akwa Ibom North East and another 111 respondents from Akwa Ibom North West because the two districts have equal number of local government areas while Akwa Ibom South had 162 respondents. The study made use of purposive sample technique to select respondents who were registered voters in the three senatorial districts during the 2023 elections. Out of the 400 copies of the questionnaire distributed, a total of 370 copies were retrieved and found useful for analysis. This accounted for 92.5% return rate. The study employed the structured questionnaire for data collection. To elicit appropriate response, nine simple items divided into two sections were formulated. Section A, made up of item 1- 5, deals with the bio-data of the respondents while Section B made up of item 6- 9 deals with core issues interrogated in the study. Three research assistants helped to administer the instrument on the respondents, each assigned to a senatorial district.

Results

Out of the 384 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 370 were completed correctly and returned while 14 copies could not be used in the analysis. The return rate was 96 per cent. The computation was done on the basis of the 370 returned copies of the questionnaire.

Table 2: Response to Whether the Media Gave Adequate Coverage to the 2023 general elections in Nigeria

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	236	63.8
No	108	29.3
Not Sure	26	6.9
Total	**370**	**100**

Field work 2024

The information on Table 2 shows that majority of the respondents, 236 (63.8%) agreed that the media gave adequate coverage to the 2023 polls. No fewer than 134 respondents in the study accounting for 36.2% were not certain.

Table 3: Response to Whether Electorate Learnt Anything from the Mass Media about the Need for Credibility in the 2023 Nigerian General Elections

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	249	67.2
No	32	8.6
Not Sure	89	24.1

Total	**370**	**100**

Field work 2024

The computations on Table 3 above show that a total of 249 respondents representing 67.2% acknowledged that the mass media had harped on the need for credibility in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria.

Table 4: Response to Whether Media Coverage of the Elections had built Confidence in the Electorate to Participate in the 2023 polls

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	159	43.1
No	154	41.4
Not Sure	57	15.5
Total	**370**	**100**

Field work 2024

The information on Table 4 shows that a total of 211 respondents representing 56.9% of the sample population did believe or were not sure whether the mass media had built their confidence of the electorate such that they participated in the elections. Only 159 respondents accounting 43.1% agreed that the mass media had inspired confidence of the electorate.

Table 5: Response to Whether the Outcomes of the Elections Depended on Media Coverage of the Exercise

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	70	19
No	236	63.8
Not Sure	64	17.2
Total	**370**	**100**

The computations on Table 5 indicate that a total of 300 respondents representing 81% of the sample population noted that the outcomes of the 2023 general elections did not depend on the media coverage of the exercise.

Discussion of Findings

From the data presentation above, it is obvious that the mass media mediatised politics in the society. The first objective of this study was to find out the extent to which the electorate perceive the mass media coverage of the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. Data presented on Table 2 show that 63.8 % of the respondents agreed that the media gave adequate coverage to the election. This indicates that majority of the respondents were satisfied with the mass media coverage of the elections. The mass media are indispensable agents in a democracy. This finding corroborates views that the mass media are beneficial to democratic politics by providing information on public events to all citizens (McQuail, 2010). The second objective of this study was to ascertain the

extent to which the mass media harp on issues of credibility of the 2023 elections as perceived by the electorate in Akwa Ibom State. From the information presented on Table 3 shows that a total of 249 respondents accounting for 67.2% agreed that the mass media gave adequate publicity to issues of credibility of the 2023 polls. This finding tallies with earlier study byEyoh (2020), which showed that voters in Akwa Ibom State depended on the mass media to form their opinions on the 2019 general polls in Nigeria. This finding also justifies the application of Agenda Setting and Framing Theories to this study.

The third objective of this study sought to ascertain whether the mass media coverage of the elections had built confidence in the electorate to participate in the 2023 elections. From the computations on Table 4, a total of 211 respondents representing 56.9% of the target population did believe or were not sure that the mass media coverage had built their confidence in the election process. This finding corroborates earlier study by Oboh (2016) that though the mass media gave adequate coverage to the 2007 general elections in Nigeria, the electorate were not certain whether the reportage gave credibility to the exercise.The fourth objective of the study dealt with the issue of whether the mass media reportage of the 2023 general elections had any influence on the outcomes of the elections. Data presented on Table 5 show that a total of 300 respondents representing 81% of the sample population believed that mass media coverage of the 2023 elections did not influence the outcomes. The finding contradicts assertions by Valentio and Nardis (2013) that the mass media can change political results by influencing the public's choice and reasoning.

Conclusion

From the analysis of the data above, this study draws the following inferences: that the mass media coverage of 2023 general elections in Akwa Ibom State recorded 63.8% among the respondents; a total of 67.2% of the respondents agreed that the issue of credibility of elections was on the front burner in the media; 56.9% of electorate were not sure whether the mass media influenced their participation in the electoral process. The study also concluded that 81% of the respondents noted that the elections outcomes did not depend on media coverage of the exercise.

Recommendations

1. The media should mainstream the issue of credibility of elections in their reportage. To have 67.2% of the respondents learned about issues of election credibility from the media is encouraging but this margin could be stepped up.
2. The media should improve on their coverage of electoral processes by providing the citizens with relevant and adequate information before, during and after voting, to narrow the gap between citizens who get inspired and those who have lost confidence in the electoral process. Voters' education should be a continuous process in the media in Nigeria.
3. There should be a strong synergy between election umpires and the mass media on how to achieve credibility in the electoral process so as to encourage greater participation of the electorate in the exercise.

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