

Research Article

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Evaluation of the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria's voter enlightenment programmes during Nigeria's 2023 general elections

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Abstract: Political literacy and active civic participation are imperative for the progress of any nation, emphasising the crucial role of mass media in empowering citizens with political knowledge. This study evaluates the effectiveness of the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria's (FRCN) voter enlightenment programmes and their impact on the civic engagement of

residents in the Abi Area Council, Cross River State, Nigeria during the 2023 general elections. Employing survey research method and purposive sampling techniques, the study is theoretically grounded in John Dalton's cognitive mobilisation theory. The research findings reveal a noteworthy listenership of FRCN's political programmes among residents of Abi LGA. Furthermore, the study establishes a correlation between FRCN's voter enlightenment programmes and the active participation of residents in the 2023 general elections. In conclusion, this research underscores the efficacy of media-driven political programmes in educating citizens about their crucial role in electoral processes. It however, recommends for the sustainability of FRCN political programmes in informing the public about electoral matters during general elections. And further recommends that FRCN programmes should be used to fostering civic engagement and as indispensable tool for continuous public education in Abi Local Government Area during and after elections.

Keywords – Awareness, Enlightenment, Evaluation, Involvement, Mass media, Programmes, Voter

1. INTRODUCTION

In contemplating the diverse and pluralistic nature of human societies worldwide, it becomes evident that the involvement of any community in electoral matters is intricately tied to the role played by the media. Empowering citizens with knowledge about political activities is paramount, enabling active participation in the progress of their respective countries. To this end, governments, individuals and various stakeholders globally employ mass media as a means of engagement. Research consistently indicates that voters' sensitisation and education significantly contribute to increased voter turnout (Burden, 2009; Lewis-Beck et al., 2008; Franklin, 2004; Sondheimer & Green, 2010).

Rainie (2012) reinforces the media's significant role in aiding voters in decision-making, exemplified by its historical function in creating awareness about political issues in the United States. Notably, Rainie (2012) reports that 22% of 2012 USA election registrants shared their voting choices based on media education. This view also indicates that 25% of Barack Obama's supporters utilize online media for the same purpose. The media, particularly television, played a significant role in various elections, including the France 2005 referendum campaign and the 2012, 2017, and 2022 elections (Gerstle, 2005; Kuhn, 2012; Majo-Vazquez & Nielsen, 2017). Similarly, Vermeer, Van Remoortere and Vliegthart (2022). This perspective also captured the instrumental role of traditional media in educating voters during the 2021 Dutch parliamentary election. Merouani's study (2019) in Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia found that mass media consumption significantly influenced voter participation, a trend similarly observed in Kenya. Maina et al., (2023) argue that political debates in Kenya have been shaped by mass media, highlighting the increased voter involvement attributed to the availability of conventional and new media.

Periodic elections are widely regarded as standard practice in modern democratic societies globally. They constitute a vital aspect of the democratization process, providing electorates with the right and opportunity to choose representatives who they believe will advocate for their interests (Isa, Yakubu, & Emmanuel, 2024). However, in Nigeria, the credibility of elections remains a subject of debate, assessed from various political, legal, and media perspectives, as well as by election observer missions and the uninformed sections of society (Heywood, 1997, as cited in Isa, Yakubu & Emmanuel, 2024). Heywood asserts that elections afford the general public an opportunity to engage in the political and electoral processes and determine who will hold political or governmental authority. The 2023 general elections in Nigeria reportedly saw significant citizen participation, attributed partly to the combined influence of the Internet and traditional media. The Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN, 2024), a prominent media organization, plays a crucial role by airing political programs during elections aimed at educating citizens about active electoral participation. Nieet et al. (1996), as cited in Odionye et al. (2023), underscore the importance of voter education as a key indicator of political involvement, enhancing an individual's ability to analyse complex political information critically, thereby fostering rational and active political engagement. Consequently, there is an expectation that as voter enlightenment programmes on FRCN intensify, citizens' political awareness and participation will increase. However, the validity of this assertion remains unexplored. Hence, this study aims to address the fundamental question: Did the voter enlightenment programmes broadcast on FRCN regarding the 2023 general elections in Nigeria influence the participation of residents in Abi Local Government Area (LGA) of Cross River State, Nigeria?

Abi Local Government Area is located in Cross River State of Nigeria and is said to be home to Agbo people who are believed to be a sub-group of Igbo speaking people of Nigeria. They are found in Delta, Iboni, Abia and some part of Rivers. Abi Local Government is located in the Central senatorial District of Cross River state with Itigidi as its headquarters and is home to annual cultural festival of Cross River people. It is important to note that with close affinity of the people of Abi to Ibos, they formed a microcosm of the representative sample of electorate from south-south and south-eastern region of Nigeria. In a nutshell, Abi is known for producing leading political stalwarts such as the former Governor of the State Liyell Imoke. His father Samuel Imoke was a cabinet minister and a leader of the Parliament in the former Eastern region. It is therefore, strategically significant in terms of electoral dynamics and demographic composition with the Ibos while deeply located within the south-south. Interestingly, Abi receives its FRCN programmes through her subsidiaries such as Purity FM 102.5 Awka, Heatland FM 100.5 Imo and Charity FM 104.4 Asaba.

2. LITERATURE SURVEY

2.1. Voter enlightenment and political participation

Electorate sensitisation, also known as voter education or enlightenment, as defined by the United Nations, encompasses the process of providing accessible information to all adult members of a democratic society. This process entails furnishing citizens of a democratic nation with fundamental information to enable their active participation in elections. Voter education involves collaborative efforts from relevant electoral bodies, media outlets, individuals, and regional or international organisations to disseminate impartial and objective information to citizens, guiding them on actions to take before, during, and after elections (The Electoral Knowledge Network, 2023). This empowers citizens to exercise their right to participate in selecting representatives at local, state, or national levels of governance. Amaechi, Innocent and Ikechukwu (2018) assert that, to establish a foundation for increased citizen voice in decision-making and the pursuit of equity and equality in a democratic setting, it is essential to equip people with the basic tenets of democracy. Deducing from Amaechi et al.'s (2018) perspective on voter education, electorate enlightenment involves providing voters with necessary information about the principles of democracy, such as how to vote, when to vote, and whom to vote for.

Furthermore, Adepoju (2022) states that voter enlightenment focuses on encouraging people in a democratic nation to take part in the affairs of their country. It deals with explaining difficult information concerning the electoral process to those who will participate in the election, as well as electorate's rights to vote. Adepoju emphasises that voter education aims to build the knowledge base of the electorate about political activities, with the goal of empowering them to actively participate in their country's electoral process. Gastil (2004) corroborates that interactions among people about political matters can alter political narratives and influence citizens' attitudes. It is crucial to the functioning of any democracy as it enhances voter participation and motivation by effectively educating the public about the importance of voting and participating in other democratic processes (Ibanga, Arugu & Ucheobi, 2020). These authors further argue that voters who are prepared, willing, and able to fully participate in the electoral process are products of voter education.

2.2. The media's role in voter mobilisation and participation in electioneering

Globally, the mass media is widely acknowledged for its role in equipping people, shaping their perspectives on various issues, and mobilising them to actively participate in developmental matters, including voting during elections. Enemaku (2013) emphasizes the undeniable importance of the media in any democratic process, asserting that members of the journalistic profession are custodians of public trust in lasting democracies. Recognising knowledge as power, Enemaku (2013) underscores that significant growth and advancement in democratic societies stem from the ample information provided by the media. Thomas Jefferson, a former American President, further underscores the significance of the media in politics and development, expressing a preference for a government with newspapers over one without a legislature.

Akinfeleye (2012) concurs with the assertion that the mass media possesses the ability to set political agendas and raise public awareness of politicians' intentions. Oso (2012) submits that the mass media plays a crucial role in bringing politics and society to light by disseminating information, providing analysis, and offering platforms for discussions on local, national, and international issues. Bappayo, Abubakar and Kirfi (2021) agree that voter education in the media is executed through various channels, including advertisements, news, political interactive programs, cartoons, features, and editorials. This involvement spans the electoral process, encompassing pre-election awareness, voters' registration, election campaigns, encouragement for voter turnout, election monitoring, reporting wrongdoings, and holding elected officials accountable to the public. The quality of media coverage accessible to the public regarding candidates, the voting process, expected public behaviour during elections, and various issues significantly influences public involvement in the political process (Ochonoghor et al., 2019).

Furthermore, Nenbuife (2011) contends that the mass media serves multiple functions beyond mere education, information, and entertainment; it also engages in selling ideas to the public and fosters social mobilisation. In other words, due to its widespread reach across society, the mass media is perceived as a potent source of information, capable of disseminating messages on various societal issues. Ibemesi and Duru(2013) similarly note that as a platform for political discourse, the media plays a role in shaping political ideologies. The authors assert that the media's ability to present political ideology in a deliberate and methodical manner is evident in its aforementioned capabilities. Dahlgren (2001) as referenced by Oso (2012) affirms that the mass media significantly contributes to the globalisation of democratic norms, wielding the power to influence public opinion by enhancing voter awareness and enlightenment.

Iredia (2007) explains that the media, comprising television, radio, newspapers, magazines, the Internet, billboards, among other platforms, constitutes the backbone of mass communication and serves as a means through which a large number of people can be reached during electioneering. The mass media acts as a disseminator of innovative ideas and information to specific groups within the community. Similarly, Anim (2008) emphasizes that the primary function of the mass media in any human setting is to collect, organise, and distribute news and various content, enabling members of the public to contribute significantly and meaningfully to the growth and development of their society.

2.3. Empirical review

Several scholars have delved into research aligned with the intersection of media, voter sensitisation, and participation in electoral processes (Burden, 2009; Gertle, 2005; Ibanga, et al., 2020). One of such studies conducted by Bappayo, Abubakar and Kirfi (2021) titled: "The Impact of Mass Media on Political Mobilisation Process in Plateau State Radio Television Corporation, Jos (PRTVC), Nigeria" explored the extent of government intrusion into PRTVC and its implications on the political mobilisation process. Adopting a survey research design, the study aimed to unravel the dynamics of government influence on PRTVC and its consequent impact on political mobilisation. The findings highlighted the significant role of a robust mass media in the actualisation of government policies and programmes, particularly in a democratic nation like Nigeria. Consequently, the study recommended that, for political mobilisation through the mass media to be effective, efficient, and impartial, media outlets should be allowed to operate in accordance with their constitutional mandate (Bappayo, Abubakar & Kirfi, 2021).

The crux of Odionyeetal's (2023) study was on "Assessment of NTA Voter Education Programmes on the Awareness and Participation in 2023 General Elections among Residents of Ugheli South LGA, Delta State, Nigeria." The study aimed to ascertain the extent of exposure, levels of awareness, attitudes, and the impact of NTA's voter education programmes on the residents. Employing a survey design, the researchers anchored their study on the Cognitive Mobilisation Theory of Political Literacy and Participation to collect data. The findings of the study revealed a significant level of exposure among respondents to NTA's voter education programmes. Moreover, participants who engaged in the study demonstrated heightened awareness of the 2023 electoral processes through these programmes. The study concluded that NTA's voter sensitisation initiatives effectively served as mechanisms for educating the populace and encouraging active participation in election-related matters in Nigeria. Consequently, the researchers advocated for a continuous effort by the mass media in Nigeria to educate the populace about political activities in the country. Furthermore, they recommended the implementation of electoral sensitisation programs in rural communities, emphasising the importance of making this a constant practice, not limited to election periods. The study proposed achieving this through the utilisation of grassroots-based communication strategies.

In a similar vein, Okon (2014) investigated "Voter Education by Nigerian Broadcast Media: A Normative Appraisal of Three Radio Stations in Port Harcourt Metropolis." The primary objective was to ascertain the nature of programmes related to voter education aired by the stations and to evaluate their impact on the electorate. The

research employed a content analysis research strategy to achieve its aims. The findings of the study unveiled various programme types utilised for voter education, encompassing news, commentaries, docu-dramas, and public service announcements. However, it emerged that the investigated broadcast establishments allocated limited airtime to programmes focused on voter mobilisation and education. Additionally, the data indicated a lack of comprehensive analysis of political matters within the scrutinised broadcast media. Consequently, the study advocated for an enhanced commitment from broadcast stations in the state to enlighten the public about electoral issues in the country. This enhancement, as suggested, could be accomplished by allocating more substantial time to voter education programmes.

Similarly, Adepoju (2022) conducted a survey-based study on "Evaluation of Broadcast Media and Voters' Education during Gubernatorial Election in Ekiti State, Nigeria." The primary objectives of the research were to examine the nature of programmes broadcast by media outlets regarding voter education and to propose strategies for enhancing voter enlightenment through broadcast media, particularly during election periods. The study identified programme types, such as 89.9 FM Voice and Arerun in Ekiti 91.5 FM, within the surveyed media outfits. Regarding the promotion of voter education, findings indicated that a collaborative effort between broadcast stations and relevant electoral bodies was essential. Additionally, staying updated on political developments and incorporating more local languages in voter education programmes were suggested approaches. The study affirmed that broadcast media establishments played a significant role in enlightening voters in the state through diverse traditional and indigenous programmes. In light of this, it was recommended that broadcast media stations should broaden their coverage of political activities, government policies, and programmes in the country to ensure that citizens are well-informed about electoral issues.

Ibe, Okoro and Onuegbu (2023) researched on "Radio Campaign and Voter Sensitisation on the 2023 Election in Port Harcourt Metropolis". The researchers aimed to achieve three key objectives. These objectives included determining the level of awareness among the electorate regarding radio programs on election-related matters, assessing whether the respondents' received messages related to voter enlightenment through radio, and evaluating the impact of such programs on the participation of the electorate in elections within Port Harcourt town. The researchers employed the survey research method, while framing theory was utilised to enhance the depth of the study. The findings revealed that although voters in Port Harcourt metropolis possessed substantial knowledge about political issues due to the messages conveyed through radio, these messages did not serve as the primary determinant for their preparedness to vote. The study's conclusion highlighted the haphazard nature of messages disseminated by radio stations regarding voter enlightenment, indicating a lack of concerted efforts by these organisations to adequately educate the electorate on the voting process. In line with these findings, the researchers recommended that the electorate in Port Harcourt metropolis should persist in listening to political messages broadcasted by radio houses in the city. Additionally, they suggested that radio organisations in Port Harcourt should intensify the airing of programs aimed at educating voters effectively. This underscores the importance of a more focused and strategic approach by radio stations to contribute meaningfully to voter enlightenment, emphasising the need for a concerted effort in informing the electorate on proper voting procedures.

A study by Kombol (2014) on "Potential Uses of Community Radio in Political Awareness: A Proposal for Nigeria" constituted a significant exploration into the prospects of utilising community radio for fostering political awareness. This study addressed three fundamental research inquiries: (1) How can community radio facilitate political awareness? (2) What inherent qualities of community radio contribute to its effectiveness in generating political awareness? (3) What challenges may arise when employing community radio for political awareness? Employing survey research methodology and grounding the investigation in Democratic Participant Theory. The findings illuminated the critical importance of judicious programmes selection and scheduling in amplifying political consciousness when community radio organisations embark on broadcasts. Particularly, the study underscored the significance of participatory techniques in radio programme production as instrumental in

educating rural dwellers on intricate political issues. It posited that those involved in radio stations should recognise community-based radio organisations as potent platforms for elevating political awareness in Nigeria, contingent upon proper implementation. The study emphasised that community-based radio organisations, when employed effectively, can serve as a robust channels for raising political awareness, particularly within the Nigerian context. Furthermore, the study urged Nigeria to glean insights from nations that have successfully harnessed community radio to sensitise their citizens about political matters.

2.4. Theoretical underspinning

The conceptual framework guiding this investigation is rooted in the Cognitive Mobilisation Theory of Political Literacy and Participation, pioneered by John Dalton in 1984. This theory posits that political engagement and education exert influence on individuals, mobilising their cognitive capacities in navigating the realm of politics. Dalton (1984), supported by Tan Cho (1999), contends that the theory revolves around how individuals engage in profound cognitive deliberations before making decisions related to political activities, such as participating in elections. Central to this theory is the assertion that political engagement and enlightenment prompt individuals to mobilize their intellectual resources, enabling them to comprehend complex political issues and fortifying their sense of civic responsibility (Denny & Doyle, 2008, as cited in Odionye et al., 2023).

This perspective emphasises that political sensitisation, enlightenment, or education plays a crucial role in deepening individuals' political consciousness, empowering their knowledge base, and facilitating their understanding of intricate political matters. This aligns with the view that political education significantly impacts people, reducing the costs and enhancing the benefits associated with participating in various political activities. Education, as an initial step, enhances the cognitive abilities necessary for grasping political concepts, while, secondly, it correlates with increased satisfaction among those with higher education levels. Tan Cho (1999) further argues that achieving a higher level of education is not the exclusive driver of political education leading to electoral participation; other socialisation agents, such as the mass media, play a substantial role in this context.

Consequently, the chosen theory proves germane to this study, anticipating that the voter enlightenment initiatives undertaken by the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria during the 2023 general elections will elevate the political consciousness of the residents of Abi Local Government Area in Cross River State, Nigeria. The adoption of the Cognitive Mobilisation Theory provides a strong framework for comprehending the cognitive processes that underline political engagement and education, enriching the understanding of the dynamics influencing voter awareness and involvement in the context of this study.

3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The influential role of mass media in shaping political agendas and fostering public awareness of political figures' intentions is undeniable. The nature and quality of media coverage citizens receive concerning candidates, the electoral process, expected conduct during elections, and other election-related matters can significantly impact their engagement in the political process. This underscores the potential of mass media to wield considerable influence over the electorate through extensive voter education and awareness reporting.

Aligned with this perspective, during election campaigns in Nigeria, as observed in various contexts, mass media outlets often allocate substantial airtime and space to political programmes aimed at informing the public on voting procedures, candidate selection, polling locations, safeguarding votes, and discouraging violence, among other pertinent issues. The Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) is one such mass media entity involved in these endeavours. However, a critical inquiry arises: did FRCN's voter enlightenment programmes during the 2023 general elections effectively heighten awareness and participation among the electorate? While existing scholarship has delved into the realms of mass media, political mobilisation, and education (Kombol, 2014; Bappayo, Abubakar & Kirfi, 2021; Adepoju, 2022; Odionye et al., 2023; Ibe, Okoro & Onuegbu, 2023), none has specifically addressed the evaluation of FRCN's voter enlightenment programmes concerning the 2023 general elections and their impact

on the level of awareness and involvement among people of Abi Local Government Area, (LGA) Cross River State, Nigeria. This research aims to fill this gap in literature.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The broad objective of this research is to assess Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria voter enlightenment and involvement of people of Abi Council Area, Cross River State, Nigeria in 2023 general elections. The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

1. Investigate whether residents of Abi Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria listen to FRCN's voter enlightenment programmes during the 2023 general elections.
2. Find out the extent of exposure of residents in Abi Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria to FRCN's voter enlightenment programmes related to the 2023 general elections.
3. Evaluate the impact of FRCN's voter enlightenment programmes on the awareness and participation of residents in Abi Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria, regarding the 2023 general elections.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

The researcher distributed 400 copies of questionnaire out of which 388 were retrieved and found useful for analysis. Percentage representation is as shown in the Figure below.

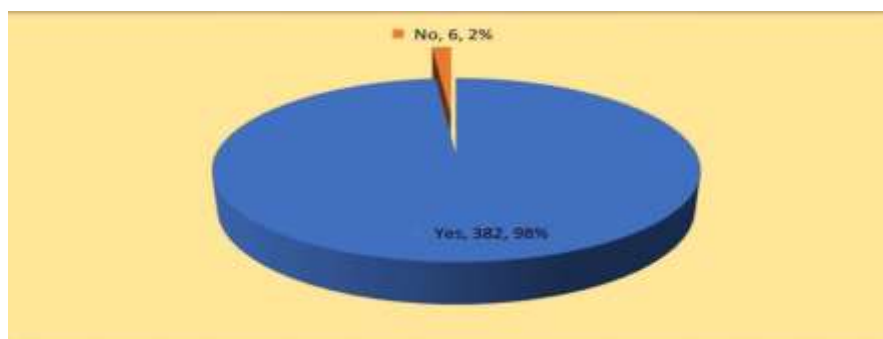


Figure 1: Residents of Abi Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria Listen to FRCN's 2023 General Elections Voter Enlightenment Programmes

The finding above indicates that most of the respondents listen to FRCN's political programmes during the 2023 general elections in the country.

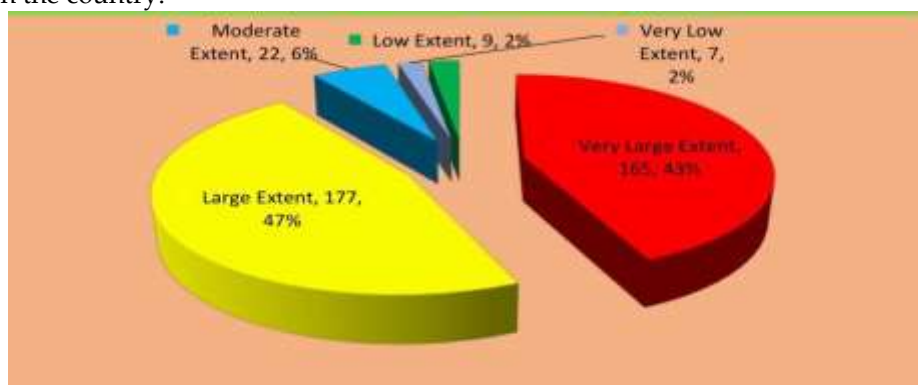


Figure 2: Extent of Exposure to FRCN's 2023 General Elections Voter Enlightenment Programmes

It could be deduced from the data in the Figure above that residents of Abi LGA, Cross River State, Nigeria are heavy listeners of FRCN's political programmes

Table 1: Effect of FRCN’s Voter Enlightenment Programmes Concerning the 2023 General Elections

Options	SA	A	SD	D	UD	Mean Rating	Decision
Through FRCN’s voter enlightenment programmes, I knew where to register and obtain Permanent Voter Card (PVC)	221	169	0	2	0	4.6	Accepted
Through FRCN’s voter enlightenment programmes, I was able to know the different aspirants and contestants and how to dissect these aspirants and contestants manifestos	314	59	0	0	9	4.7	Accepted
FRCN’s voter education programmes motivated me to take active part in the 2023 general elections	305	77	0	0	0	4.7	Accepted
The programmes encouraged me to shun violence before, during and after the elections	258	101	11	4	8	4.5	Accepted
FRCN’s voter enlightenment programmes during the 2023 elections were good means through which the Nigerian government and relevant stakeholders educated the people on their political rights	326	56	0	0	0	4.8	Accepted
Through FRCN’s voter education programmes, I was able to motivate my friends, neighbours, relatives, worshipping community members to participate in the 2023 general elections	272	93	6	0	11	4.6	Accepted
Through FRCN’s voter enlightenment programmes, I became knowledgeable on how to cast and protect my vote	315	67	0	0	0	4.8	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2024

It could be inferred from the finding in Table 1 above that radio is a veritable medium for voter mobilisation, enlightenment and participation in electoral processes.

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

6.1. Research design

The research employed a survey research design to gather data for the investigation. This choice of research method aligns with the recommendations put forth by scholars such as Creswell (2009) and Smith (1983), asserting the suitability of a survey for studies involving large populations and the collection of diverse opinions on a given topic.

6.2. Population of the study

The targeted population for this study consisted of residents of Abi Local Government Area in Cross River State, Nigeria. According to data from City Population (2024), the projected number of residents in this area is 219,800.

6.3. Sample size and sampling technique

To facilitate a practical sampling process, the study utilised a multistage sampling technique. This approach involves the sequential selection of samples in stages until the desired sample size is achieved. The initial stage of sampling employed a purposive sampling method, focusing exclusively on the adult population of the area. This deliberate choice was based on the assumption that adults would possess the requisite cognitive capacity to comprehend the voter education messages broadcasted by the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria. Adults in this study are people between the ages of 18 and above. Furthermore, availability sampling technique was employed. The researchers decided to use this technique because it relies on data collection from population members who are conveniently available to participate in the study. The study's sample size was 400, which was determined through Taro Yamane (1976) sample size formula.

The method reads thus:

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

The formula read thus.

Where

n= Sample size

e= Margin of Errors (0.05)²

N= Total population

To obtain sample using the above stated formula, the calculation was done as follows:

219,800

$$\frac{219,800}{1 + 219,800(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{219,800}{1 + 219,800 \times (0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{219,800}{549.5}$$

$$549.5$$

$$n = 399.45 \approx 400$$

6.4. Research instruments

The research utilised a questionnaire as the primary instrument for data collection. Questionnaire is a research device or instrument that is made up of a series of questions which are closed-ended or open-ended use to collect relevant data from the targeted population (Ndukwu, 2020). The research adopted the questionnaire as instrument for data collection because it allows a large amount of information to be collected from the large population within a short period of time and because it cost effective.

6.5. Validity and reliability of research instrument

To ensure the validity of the research instrument, academic modifications were implemented. Additionally, reliability was established by administering through the use of split-half method. The researchers applied this technique by dividing the population into two equal half and then compared the results. From the comparison made, the results showed positivity.

6.6. Method of data collection

The administration of the research instrument was done on a face-to-face basis by the researcher. The justification for the adoption of direct method of data collection is because such technique ensures a high return rate of the questionnaire administered as well as waiting for the respondents to send their responses is avoided in this form of data collection. Also, three research assistants were trained and engaged by the researchers who helped in the data collection.

6.7. Method of data analysis

Data presentation was carried out employing a comprehensive approach, including frequency and percentage tables, charts, and the calculation of mean deviation. Responses were categorised using the Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (U), Strongly Disagree (SD), and Disagree (D) scale, providing a nuanced understanding of participants' perspectives. This method of presentation allowed for a clear and detailed exploration of the data, facilitating a clear analysis of residents' awareness and involvement in the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria's voters' enlightenment programmes related to the 2023 general elections in Abi Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria.

7. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

Upon meticulous examination of the collected data from the participants, the study revealed a noteworthy trend regarding the listenership of the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria's (FRCN) political programmes during the 2023 general elections (refer to Figure 1). A substantial majority of respondents acknowledged actively tuning in to FRCN's broadcasts, indicating a considerable engagement with the media outlet's electoral content. This finding implies that large and steady listenership of voter enlightenment programmes through the medium of radio and other mass media is regarded as being responsible for people's understanding of democratic principles, especially in a country like Nigeria. The implication of this result could also be that the citizens' rights to be involved in election-related matters are enhanced via constant and sustained participation in political programmes disseminated by the mass media. This finding is consistent with the outcomes of a study by Odionye et al. (2023), which identified residents of Ugheli South LGA, Delta State, Nigeria, actively participating in the 2023 general elections due to their exposure to voter education programmes on the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA). Additionally, Adepoju's (2022) study in Ekiti revealed a similar trend, where residents were exposed to GM Voice and Arerun political programmes on 89.9 and 91.5 FM, respectively.

Further analysis of the data demonstrated that a significant proportion of respondents had a high level of exposure to FRCN's voter enlightenment programmes during the 2023 general elections (see Figure 2). Specifically, 47% reported listening to such programmes to a very large extent, while 43% indicated listening to a large extent. The implication is that media initiatives, particularly those of FRCN, aimed at enlightening potential voters, played a significant role in encouraging active participation in the electoral process. It could further be inferred that media programmes such as the voter education on FRCN have radically altered the ways Nigerians take part in elections. Such media programmes have deepened their understanding of the country's electoral processes. Participants credited FRCN's programmes with informing them about voter registration procedures, the collection of Permanent Voter Cards, details about candidates and their manifestoes, and guidelines for peaceful conduct before, during, and after the elections (refer to Table 1). The positive impact of these programmes extended to participants actively influencing their social circles, including friends, relatives, and religious communities, to engage actively in the elections.

This finding underscores the potential of consistent voter sensitisation and enlightenment initiatives, such as those undertaken by FRCN during the 2023 general elections, to broaden citizens' knowledge of political issues in a country like Nigeria. It aligns with the findings of Ibe et al. (2023), who observed active electoral participation among their sample due to radio programmes' influence. Furthermore, these outcomes resonate with the principles

of the Cognitive Mobilisation Theory of Political Literacy and Participation, the theoretical framework guiding this study. The theory posits that political engagement and enlightenment stimulate individuals to organise their intellectual resources, enabling them to effectively address and manage political issues within their communities. In essence, the study's findings highlight the tangible impact of FRCN's voter enlightenment programmes in fostering informed and actively engaged citizens during the 2023 general elections. The implication is that political enlightenment enables the people to support democratic ideals and the more the citizens' knowledge is broadened regarding political principles and institutions, through the instrumentality of the mass media, the more likely they are to support core democratic philosophies.

8. CONTRIBUTIONS TO SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Knowledge is a growing phenomenon. With this, the study has contributed to empirical literature on the use of mass media for voter education, not only in Nigeria but across the globe. Scholars have studied and examined the impact of voter education through the mass media both in urban and rural areas. However, none of these studies concentrated on the effects of FRCN voter enlightenment programmes during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria, focusing on residents of Abi LGA, Cross River State, Nigeria. This implies that this study may be helpful for the researchers to understand radio voter education and enlightenment from the perspective of Cross River State people of Nigeria.

9. CONCLUSION

It is well acknowledged that the emergence of mass media as a mass mobilisation platform has paved way for the engagement of the people in developmental issues, politics inclusive. This implies that, media programmes on politics hold immense potential to broaden the knowledge base of the electorate thereby enhancing their participation in their country's democratic journey. The use of radio, in particular, to educate and enlighten the citizens on voting during elections presents an opportunity for them to be actively involved. Thus, this study, which centred on the assessment of the effect of Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria's voter enlightenment programmes, have the level of awareness and involvement in the 2023 general elections among residents of Abi Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria. It concluded that the studied population is a heavy follower of voter education programmes on FRCN. Conclusion is further drawn that the voter enlightenment initiatives implemented by the FRCN constitute a highly effective strategy for educating the public about political matters and motivating them to actively participate in Nigeria's electoral process.

In light of this conclusion, the paper recommends that the significant strides achieved in voter education during the 2023 general elections by FRCN should serve as a foundation to sustained democracy. Secondly, it is recommended that FRCN, along with other mass media outlets, should disseminate objective and comprehensive voter education programmes to nooks and crannies of Nigeria. Thirdly, FRCN enlightenment programmes should focus on not just electoral matters but fostering peaceful co-habitation amongst citizenry and contributing to the enhancement of democratic processes within Nigeria. This recommendation aligns with the broader discourse on the significant role of media in nurturing civic awareness and active participation in democratic practices. Equally, for improved election outcomes in Nigeria, political enlightenment initiatives by the local, state and federal governments should be strengthened.

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