

Towards Credible Elections in Nigeria: Assessing the Media Roles

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Abstract

Credible elections cannot happen without first addressing the electoral system. This research analyzed how the media may help bring about the electoral changes that are necessary for Nigeria to have legitimate elections. In order to have a really free and fair election, electoral reform is essential. It was decided to evaluate the literature on electoral changes and the media's involvement in electoral reforms. The research relied heavily on the rational choice theory, which describes how people's preferences and actions shape electoral outcomes. To gather information, we employed a questionnaire. Findings demonstrated the need for electoral changes to ensure legitimate elections in Nigeria. This is due to the public's high degree of tolerance of media information on electoral changes and the media's focus on these topics in Nigeria. These results provide light on why the media's participation in electoral reforms and the holding of fair elections in Nigeria was so crucial. People in Nigeria think that media coverage of electoral reforms has not only laid the groundwork for legitimate elections, but has also significantly stoked popular demand for such changes. However, since the media can influence behaviour, it is expected that media practitioners will increase their current efforts to raise public awareness on electoral reforms and other political matters in Nigeria. However, responsible behaviour during elections is also a prerequisite for credible elections.

Keywords: 1.Credible Election; 2.Electorates; 3.Electoral Reforms; 4.Media; 5.Prerequisites

Introduction

In countries like Nigeria, where citizens have a say in who runs the federal, state, and municipal governments, elections play a critical role. One way to look at it is as the process by which a representative of the people is chosen to act on their behalf in governing structures. Polls in Nigeria, however, have been marred by electoral manipulations, frauds, inter- and intra-party rivalry, rigging, stealing of materials for elections, danger to life, assassination, and violence for a long time (Osinakachukwu&Jawan, 2011). Over the years, local and international observers of elections in Nigeria have consistently expressed dismay at the prevalence of irregularities and manipulation they saw (Animashau, 2010). In many elections in the past and in 2019, there was a lack of organization, transparency, procedural equality, substantial evidence of fraud, widespread voter disenfranchisement at different stages of the process, unequal conditions for political parties and candidates, and numerous incidents of violence. This condition explains why democratic government has not been fully realized, despite the fact that both effective political involvement and equal allocation of wealth are prerequisites (Odeomelam, 2011). Electoral changes have been prompted by unhealthy rivalry and fierce battle for political control of government. The desire to gain power by whatever means necessary is a driving force behind many of these irregularities (Popoola, 2011).

Due to the aforementioned problems, Nigerians have taken to the media to demand a thorough overhaul of the country's election system (Obakhedo, 2011). When the system for electing representatives is unreliable,

ineffective, or otherwise not up to par with international standards, improvements are required. Some have argued for a fully impartial election referee and a switch to an electronic voting system. That the election umpire, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), is not independent owing to foreign intervention is something that Nigerians are aware of (Oboh, 2016). It is possible for federal and state governments to meddle in INEC's operations and management. A national head of INEC is appointed by the president, while electoral commissioners are appointed by governors at the state level. Because of the president's or governor's influence over appointments and budget, INEC is likely to bow to their every whim.

The Constitution from 1999 lays forth the fundamental protections and responsibilities of the press. According to Article 22, the media must both bring the government to account and support national goals. 25 Freedom of speech and the right to establish a media outlet are guaranteed under Section 39 of the Constitution, subject to specific criteria and the approval of the President. Legal restrictions on media freedom include those pertaining to libel, sedition, contempt of court, and the Official Secrets Act. The Freedom of Information Act, which went into effect in 2011, seeks to improve government transparency and accountability by expanding access to public documents and data.

"The press, radio, television, and other agencies of the media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this Chapter and to uphold the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people," Section 22 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 states. The Cybercrimes Act of 2015 prohibits the dissemination of racist and xenophobic content online. To address the lack of social media-specific rules, the National Assembly introduced the Digital Rights and Freedom Bill on 5 February 2019, which is now awaiting presidential approval. President Trump, however, did not agree. The law followed earlier attempts to regulate social media, which were met with opposition from diverse parties, and detailed digital media freedoms such as the right to privacy, offences, and punishments.

National media outlets, in particular, do not have the mandate or the right to act as a political party's or administration's spokesperson. Its primary function is to inform the public and provide a forum for open discussion of diverse viewpoints. The author (Michael) states that in 2005. Observation teams during elections, for instance, often make observations on media coverage and access as a means of determining the legitimacy of elections. The media's impact on an election may be gauged by a mix of statistical analysis, methods from media studies, and discourse analysis, and this approach has grown more prevalent throughout election seasons.

However, past research was able to shed light on the significant influence the media has on political processes, choices, and actions. However, it was noted that the importance of electoral reforms as a necessary condition for trustworthy elections in Nigeria may not have received sufficient attention. Also, it is unclear from the available evidence whether or not the media have a substantial influence in encouraging voters to support electoral changes that contribute to the credibility of elections.

Objectives of the Study

This research aims to do the following:

1. Analyze the impact of the media on electoral reforms, which are crucial for holding legitimate elections.
2. The importance of the media in bringing about election change in Nigeria should be investigated.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Analysis of research on voting system changes was conducted.

Many political transitions have occurred in Nigeria since its independence, all of which have resulted in electoral changes, in other to bring to about sustainable development (Akpokiniovo, 2018). In 1998, as part of the transition process of ushering in the 4th Republic, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was founded. There have been three attempts at reorganizing the voting system since 1999.

Within the context of the transitional decrees enacted by the military dictatorship, elections were held beginning with municipal elections in 1998 and concluding with state and national elections in 1999. Therefore, it fell on the newly elected National Assembly to create electoral regulations that would govern the process of holding subsequent elections. The result of this effort was the Electoral Act of 2001. The National Assembly was the primary force behind the measure, and the legislative process around it got mired in political and legal controversy. The Attorney General of Abia State challenged the Act in court on the grounds that it infringed on

the authority of state-level IECs to oversee elections for local governments. Because of this court's decision, the Act was nullified, and a new law was drafted with assistance from INEC, rather than the National Assembly.

The Electoral Act of 2002 was signed into law after the bill was introduced. Again, the new legislation was challenged in court when INEC disputed the National Assembly's authority to set the election schedule. The Act was also challenged by political parties on the grounds that the Act's conditions for the registration of political parties ran counter to fundamental constitutional guarantees (INEC, 2003). The Electoral Act of 2002 was revised in response to these lawsuits, and became law as the Electoral Act of 2003. According to the Nigeria Electoral Review (2003), INEC conducted a post-election review exercise after the 2003 elections, the results of which were the drafting and submission of the 2005 Electoral Reform Bill, which sought to fill the loopholes in the existing law and address the difficulties that had been encountered in the 2003 elections. With their efforts, INEC helped get the Electoral Act of 2006 passed.

After international observers concluded that the 2007 elections did not meet international standards (Nigerian Final Report General Elections, 2012) and President YarAdua admitted as much in his inaugural address (Oyekami, B. 2013), the president appointed an Electoral Reform Committee (ERC) led by Justice Uwais, a former Chief Justice of the Federation, to make recommendations for electoral reforms. As early as December 2008, the ERC presented its findings to the Executive. The Executive put together a white paper that was used as a starting point for writing the Constitutional Amendment Bill, which itself drew on some of the ERC's suggestions.

The election process was heavily impacted by the constitutional amendment process, and INEC was present during the bill's public hearings. In addition, INEC proposed amendments to the electoral law to the National Assembly before the 2011 elections to bring the electoral legislation into line with the revised constitution and to extend the period during which citizens may register to vote. Following the elections of 2011, INEC performed a number of post-election review activities, including an independent post-election audit, and has since submitted suggestions to the National Assembly to alter the electoral laws, which are presently being considered by the legislature.

Another perspective, articulated by Shehu et al. (2017), sees electoral reform through the lens of state-centric regulations controlling the conduct and administration of elections. They see a need for election reform because of certain problems and problems in certain locations. Electoral reform is described as "the modification of election processes," according to the Macmillan Dictionary Online. Specifically, electoral reform is defined by Eme (2008) as a modification in the electoral process or system that is intended to improve the expression of voters' will in election outcomes. In terms of holding free and fair elections and putting those responsible for election fraud to account, these desired improvements have the potential to usher in beneficial ideas and initiatives that will improve the lives of the people.

Voting systems need to be updated gradually. Research shows that the scope of electoral reform is broad (Norris, 1995; Animashaun, 2010; IDEA, 2016; Botchway & Kwarteng, 2018). Issues of electoral reform, according to Botchway and Kwarteng (2018), include expanding the franchise, redrawing electoral districts, and stamping out electoral corruption. Voter registration, polling place improvements, public financing of political parties, and control of political broadcasts are all mentioned as potential components of electoral reform. The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA, 2016) defines electoral reform as efforts to bring elections closer to voters' choices and expectations. However, it stresses that "not all electoral change can be considered as electoral reform" and that "electoral change can only be referred to as reform if its primary goal is to improve electoral processes," such as by promoting increased impartiality, inclusiveness, transparency, integrity, or accuracy (p. 295). Therefore, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) defines three separate areas of electoral reform, each of which an Electoral Management Body (EMB, in this instance INEC) and its stakeholders may play various roles: legal, administrative, and political.

In the context of legal electoral reforms, this may include institutional reform of the INEC itself, as well as amendments to the constitution, electoral laws, or related regulations and rules to improve the electoral process's transparency and legitimacy, as well as the legal framework within which INEC provides its services (Botchway & Kwarteng, 2018). In contrast, administrative electoral reform entails a more efficient, effective, and sustainable implementation of the EMBs' constitutionally mandated legal responsibilities through the

introduction of new strategies, structures, policies, procedures, and technical innovations in the delivery of their services (IDEA, 2016).

Electoral changes in Nigeria are occasionally dictated by the governing party or ruling class or politicians, despite appeals for change from the people at large. Renwick (2010) had suggested that, just as there are various stakeholders in the adjustments or reform processes, the electoral system may be susceptible to change in a variety of ways, under a variety of conditions. Politicians are involved in and have a say in the majority of electoral changes. This aligns with the opinion of Levenaar and Hazan (2011), who state that electoral reform is popular depending on position, as those in the status quo may not favour electoral reforms due to the fact that they are in power thanks to the existing system, which additionally protects and promotes their interests, and as those who are not in power and have not succeeded with the current system want reforms for their advantages as well as for the good of all. It has been argued by the writers cited above, and by Shehuet. al. (2017) as well, that party interests are a decisive and formative factor in the politics of electoral changes. According to these critics, electoral reform in Nigeria is characterized by a never-ending cycle of changes with little follow-through on the results. They think electoral reform is now being used to install people in power, provide people access to state resources in exchange for loyalty or Favour, and generally mislead the public in order to gain support for the status quo. But it does not mean election changes cannot be effective if they are done honestly.

Election-related issues may damage citizens' faith in their government and the democratic process as a whole, making electoral reforms all the more critical in Nigeria and other emerging democracies (Onapajo, 2015). Most all electoral changes include and are affected by politicians (Renwick, 2010). According to Bishop and Hoeffler (2016), despite the fact that elections take place on a daily basis in the vast majority of the world's states, only about half of them can be considered credible due to the presence of irregularities that undermine the effectiveness and ability of democracy to deliver what is expected for both states and their citizens.

Theoretical Framework

The hypothesis was grounded on Rational Choice Theory. Cesare Beccaria is credited with developing Rational Choice Theory (RCT) in the 18th century, although his work was largely ignored at the time. Later, in 1957, Anthony Downs expanded on this idea as an economic theory of democracy to clarify how the actions and choices of individuals underpin the study of microeconomics. Later, Gary Becker became the early proponent of extending this idea to political science and sociology. According to Hazan and Lenaar (2012), the key idea behind this theory is that collective social behaviour is the end effect of the actions of discrete agents. Factors that influence an individual's decision-making are also a central theme of the theory. It outlines the steps one must take to choose which of many possible courses of action the best fit for their particular situation is.

This theory as described by Hazan and Lenaar (2012), who maintain that changes in electoral reforms are made as a result of the deliberately planned forecasts of elites to make and implement regulations and rules concerning elections in order to secure future elections, consolidate power and optimize political and electoral benefits. According to Shehuet. al. (2017), elites and politicians are always aware of the results of electoral reforms, even if those in the opposition or those who lose power are more inclined to advocate for changes to the voting system (Hazan & Lenaar). Democracies in most underdeveloped countries are precarious because the political structures supporting them are unreliable (Marx & Suri, 2016). Most Nigerian elections have been marred by violence, rigging, or other anomalies; as a result, the country's electoral rules, as well as its approach to elections and democracy more broadly, should be reviewed or updated to reflect current best practices. However, state officials, the governing party, and people in power are more likely to embrace or promote the notion of electoral changes if they believe the results would benefit or at least not threaten their chances of future election victory. They also give in to public or opposition pressure to change or revise the laws in order to improve the effectiveness of the voting system. Where the election changes jeopardized the electoral possibilities of the status quo, numerous delay tactics, delayed parliamentary approval, inadequate implementation of the legislation may certainly follow.

According to Dez (2001), preferences are seen as exogenous in rational choice, therefore the topic of preference creation is generally ignored; agents are rational and will always behave to maximize their self-interest. More often than not, politicians are regarded to be not just reasonable thinkers but also short-term thinkers. When politicians stop keeping their word, as is the case often in Nigeria, voters make decisions based on short-term political calculations without giving any thought to or comprehension of the likely long-term implications. The

term "Promise and Performance Paradigm" (PPP) is used to describe the discrepancy between these two factors. There has been a break or departure between campaign promises and actual government action.

Regarding this research, rational choice theory encourages voters to make informed decisions based on objective criteria, such as campaign promises and actual outcomes. Within rational choice analysis, explanatory arguments will alter based on what the precise aims of political actors are supposed to be, and on the number and rigidity with which rational choice assumptions are made. The rational choice hypothesis empowers voters by proposing structural changes to our political system that might otherwise threaten the separation of powers between the executive and legislative branches. The rational choice postulate has the potential to compel powerful people to adopt policy changes they might otherwise resist.

Rational choice theory's explanation in this research suggests that voters have preferences and make decisions based on those choices. By lobbying for voting system changes, voters will be able to use rational choice theory when deciding who to vote for in the next election. If the ruling party fails to provide as expected, voters may use their right to choose a different option under rational choice theory and elect the opposition. This happened in Nigeria in the 2015 general election when the incumbent People's Democratic Party (PDP) was voted out of office by the more populist All Progressives Congress (APC) (APC).

Voters' selection of candidates in an election is heavily weighted by the issues and policy design of the political parties under the rational choice method. Choosing this path is logical. This is typical of the wealthy and powerful, who often vote for a certain party or candidate because of the personal financial or political advantage they anticipate. In the Nigerian democratic system, voters do not use reason but instead vote based on their emotions (Sule & Tai, 2018). In Nigeria, the new voting system is being used as a means of gaining power and access to government programmes and services. Voters have sway over electoral changes because of the influence of politicians. Here is where the rational choice postulate becomes crucial to new voting procedures. In this way, rational choice theory in analyzing electoral reform maintains that voters are an integral part of the reform processes, and that voters' decisions, rather than politicians', should ultimately decide which candidate is elected.

Methodology

The survey research design was used for this cross-sectional investigation. The intended audience consisted of Delta State residents who were registered to vote in the upcoming 2023 general election. There were a total of 2,845,274 voters registered. (for examples, visit www.inec.gov.ng and www.pulse.ng). Given the sensitive nature of the topic at hand, we limited our sample to the group of politically engaged and informed citizens.

The Krejcie and Morgan formula was used to describe how the sample size was calculated for the aforementioned study population. Only utilize this sample size if your study's target audience is more than 10,000 people.

This research used a multi-stage sampling strategy to select one urban and one semi-urban town from each of Delta State's three senatorial districts: Asaba and Ubiaruku for the Delta North Senatorial District; Abraka and Ugbomro for the Delta Central Senatorial District; and Warri and Ozoro for the Delta South Senatorial District. The study generated data and analyzed same using relevant descriptive statistics which included frequency counts, simple percentages, mean, and standard deviation.

Presentation of Results

The obtained outcomes were tabulated and discussed hereunder;

Table 1: Discussion on Electoral Reforms Necessary for Meaningful Elections

S/N	Questionnaire Items	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Remarks
ER.1	The electoral process in Nigeria has undergone reforms in recent times	345	4.28	0.573	Strongly Agree
ER.2	Electoral reforms ensures that electorates' desires are reflections of election results	345	4.48	0.518	Strongly Agree
ER.3	Electoral reform is prerequisite for credible elections	345	4.59	0.631	Strongly Agree
ER.4	Through electoral reforms, the voting systems and the rules guiding the activities of political parties are well addressed	345	4.44	0.573	Strongly Agree
ER.5	The electoral reform in Nigeria adequately addressed issues bordering on credible, free and fair elections..	345	4.30	0.597	Strongly Agree

Mean point (3.00)

Table 2: Evaluate the role of the media in promoting change in Nigeria's election system.

S/N	Questionnaire Items	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Remarks
CO.1	The media contents create awareness to the defects of the current electoral system in Nigeria	345	4.28	0.886	Strongly Agree
CO.2	The media contents educate the public on the ideal electoral system acceptable in democratic societies globally	345	4.24	0.999	Strongly Agree
CO.3	The media contents arouse the public political consciousness on electoral reforms	345	4.18	0.687	Strongly Agree
CO.4	The media contents encourage the public to be involved in the clamour for electoral reform in Nigeria.	345	4.06	1.137	Strongly Agree
CO.5	The media contents motivate the public to participate in electoral reform processes	345	4.11	0.941	Strongly Agree

Mean point (3.00)

Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this research is twofold: (1) to assess the importance of the media to electoral changes in Nigeria, and (2) to investigate the influence of the mass media on electoral reforms as a requirement for legitimate elections. This goal was accomplished by using Delta State as a case study. Three hundred eighty-five (385) respondents were selected at random from six villages in Delta State and given a copy of the questionnaire to fill out as part of the study's initial data collection process. Three hundred and seventy (370) questionnaires were recovered from the original 385 disseminated; twenty-five (25) were deemed unsuitable, leaving 345 questionnaires that were properly filled out and submitted for examination.

The mean score on questions designed to elicit information about respondents' familiarity with proposed changes to the voting process and the role of the media. There were no items with mean scores below the minimum required threshold of 3.00. The majority of respondents strongly agreed with the claim that improvements had been made to the election process in Nigeria, as shown by a mean score of 4.28 in table.

Similarly, the mean score of 4.48 on questionnaire item ER.2 showed that respondents believed election outcomes would accurately represent the preferences of the majority of electorates after electoral changes. The mean score of 4.59 on question ER.3 of the questionnaire indicates that the vast majority of respondents feel that the country's election procedures may be reframed via electoral reforms.

Furthermore, the mean answer (4.44), for questionnaire item ER.4, suggests that most respondents firmly feel that voting methods and regulations controlling the actions of political parties may be appropriately handled by electoral reforms. The average response to the question of whether electoral reforms in Nigeria properly handle concerns related to the security of voters, election workers, and election monitoring by candidates and political parties was 4.30, indicating a positive answer.

When asked about the media's coverage of electoral changes, respondents said that it is an important topic that receives sufficient coverage. This satisfies goal one. These findings were discussed. The mean answer on item AT.1 of the questionnaire was 4.37, with a standard deviation of 0.518. It is evident from these findings that the vast majority of respondents in Nigeria consider a media role on electoral reforms to be essential for legitimate elections.

With a mean score of 4.32, respondents strongly confirmed that the media often reports on election changes in Nigeria, as stated in questionnaire item AT.2. A similar survey posed the question, "Has the rising demand for public requests for electoral changes as requirement for credible election been influenced by the frequency of news on electoral reform?" The average number of votes cast was 4.50, with the standard deviation being 0.638. This result demonstrated that a large percentage of respondents are convinced that rising public demands for electoral reforms in Nigeria as a necessity for free and fair elections have resulted from the media's regular reporting of problems of electoral reforms.

The second primary goal of this research is to ascertain the extent to which the media had a role in driving election changes in Nigeria. To be more precise, the results demonstrated that the vast majority of respondents agreed that the media contents were demands for the development of the electoral processes in Nigeria as a requirement for credible election. Moreover, it was observed that the vast majority of the Nigerian population thinks the media's coverage of electoral reforms in Nigeria is crucial for bolstering democracy because of the media's ability to establish the agenda and frameworks for electoral changes in Nigeria. This data suggests that a large proportion of respondents hold the view that media contents define agenda and frameworks for electoral changes in Nigeria.

Consistent with the results of previous research According to studies by Ashraf (2015), Oboh(2016), Suntaiand Targena (2017), and Abubakar (2018), the majority of Delta State residents feel, at least tacitly, that the general public has a high degree of trust in media materials, particularly in regards to electoral changes in the nation. Given the public's high degree of trust and acceptance of media materials, it is not surprising that coverage of electoral reform in the media has stimulated calls for change in Nigeria's voting system.

Importantly, this study's questionnaire questions revealed that the great majority of respondents were aware that electoral reform in Nigeria had recently taken place, and that electoral reform, together with education efforts from the mass media, is a necessity for legitimate elections.

Conclusion

Credible elections in Nigeria cannot occur without first instituting electoral reform. Several topics are examined in this research in an effort to shed light on them, including the importance of electoral changes in Nigeria and the role of the media in bringing about such reforms. Questionnaires were used to collect the necessary information. According to the results, the media had a crucial role in pushing election changes to the forefront of public discourse and agenda-setting. The media may also influence public opinion and lead to shifts in policy and behaviour. Electoral changes in Nigeria are covered by the media, and the public generally approves of coverage on the topic.

However, since the media can influence behaviour, it is expected that media practitioners will increase their current efforts to raise public awareness on electoral reforms and other political matters in Nigeria. However, responsible behaviour during elections is also a prerequisite for credible elections.

It was suggested that journalists in Nigeria should step up their existing efforts to raise public awareness about election reform and other political concerns. Furthermore, proactive efforts should be taken to preserve a decent

quality of journalism and media framing in Nigeria to ensure that media material on electoral reforms and other political concerns continues to meet a level of acceptance that is acceptable to the public.

Indeed, the findings of this study serve as a constant reminder to the government, political interest groups, and media practitioners who are stakeholders in the agitations for electoral reforms in Nigeria that they must continue to agitate for improvement on the electoral reforms processes of the country until complete independence of the electoral umpire, provision of independent candidate, and electronic voting among others are provided for in the Electoral Act. Future scholars who are interested in this topic will benefit from the theoretical and empirical groundwork provided by this study. This research opens the door for a closer look at what the media is saying about election changes in Nigeria. This research breathes new life into the fields of political communication and electoral behaviour studies.

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