

# Anambra Residents' Knowledge and Perception of Broadcast Media Coverage of the 2024 Local Government Election.

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigated Anambra residents' knowledge and perception of broadcast media coverage of the 2024 local government election. The main objectives of the study were to find out the level of exposure and knowledge of Anambra residents to broadcast media coverage of the 2024 local government elections and to ascertain how Anambra residents perceive the broadcast media coverage of the 2024 local government election. The study used two theories; Agenda setting and perception theory. The survey research method was adopted. The study found that a greater (40%) number of the respondents were highly exposed to and knowledgeable about the 2024 Anambra local government election. Also, it was revealed that most of the respondents representing 36%, accessed the 2024 local government elections through Anambra State Broadcasting Service and Radio Sapientia FM Onitsha. Further findings showed that 40% of the respondents had a good perception of broadcast media coverage of the 2024 Anambra State local government. The study concludes that most of the respondents were highly exposed to and knowledgeable about the 2024 Anambra local government election.

## INTRODUCTION

Election is when citizens vote for their representatives or leaders. It's a fundamental aspect of democracy, allowing people to participate in shaping their country's future. Elections can take various forms, such as presidential, parliamentary, or local council elections. Araba and Braimah (2015) opine that election is an integral part of a democratic process that empowers the citizenry to determine fairly and freely who should lead them at every level of government periodically and make decisions that shape their socioeconomic and political destiny. Elections may also be used to approve or reject a political proposition. The voting process is the most important institutional component of democratic governments and electoral systems. This is because, under democratic systems and voting procedures, the legitimacy of the government comes directly and exclusively from the permission of the population (Adibe, 2015 cited in Bappayo, Abubakar, Kirfi, & Ali, 2021).

However, the period leading to an election serves as an avenue for citizens to know more about various candidates. The information gathered during this period can shape their choice of voting. Every citizen can't have a one-on-one talk with every candidate, to fully understand their political ideology and what they have to offer, citizens rely on the media to report information about each candidate contesting for a political position and an informed analysis of each candidate's background about the election. Citizens rely on the media because it is the easiest avenue to obtain information, hence the media coverage of each candidate becomes paramount because it is a potent tool that can shape voters' choices (Oloyede, 2019). Due to the importance of a local government election, it is therefore necessary for the media to present factual and verifiable information to the citizens.

As an important part of the electioneering process, broadcast media and other media genres play crucial roles in shaping the chances of political candidates and the choices voters make. As such, there is no successful election campaign without the media. To that extent, the media-politician nexus has been described as "mutual

dependence” (Hangali and Kriesi, 2018 cited in Ogbodo, Ugbo, Duru, & Jibrin, 2021). The existing literature has therefore shown that the mass media can influence the voting habits of voters because they serve the purpose of media literacy for elections (Zannu et al., 2024). However, elections provide a forum for the discussion of public opinion on important issues. Elections allow an exchange of influence between leaders and the electorate (Nwaozuzu 1999 as cited in Ezegwu, Ezeji, Chukwuemeka, and Chime-Nganya, 2024). This statement captures the relevant functions of the broadcast media in elections which serves as a mobilizing of all the different people in society and at the same time co-ordinate the activities as they are made to express their views about candidates who are contesting for political positions. The broadcast media through their programmes create avenues through which the people express their views about candidates. There may be phone calls in programmes like radio link, state of the nation, or debate programmer responsible or otherwise and has made people pass on topical political issues. The broadcast media is one of the most strategic means of winning the hearts and minds of the electorate who are the determinants and king makers in any democratic, free, fair and transparently credible election” (Kediehor, 2019, p. 211). The electorate generally relies on the broadcast media during electioneering campaigns to provide the needed information for them to make well-versed decisions. The mass media through their fundamental functions educate the electorate (Asemah, 2011 cited in Tsegysu, 2020). They serve as a vital link between political candidates and the electorate. Media serves as a platform for political parties and their candidates to campaign for votes. Through their coverage of political activities, the public can make wise choices for the political candidates and parties to vote for. The media plays a crucial role in informing the public about politics, campaigns, and elections. The Anambra State Independent Electoral Commission (ANSIEC) conducted the local government election on September 28, 2024, in the 21 local government areas of the State. The last time a local government election took place in Anambra was in 2014 during the administration of former governor Peter Obi. Over 100 candidates from various political parties contested the election. Before the election, the LGAs had been under the control of the Caretaker Transition Committee Chairman since 2014, appointed for a specific term by the governor (Obianeri, 2024). However, prominent among the various media that reported the 2024 Anambra LG election in Anambra State were the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Anambra Broadcasting Service (ABS) Purity FM Awka, Radio Sapientia FM Onitsha, Authority Radio Nnewi, Ogene FM Awka, among others. These broadcast stations in Anambra State covered campaigns by the various political parties, reported various information from the Anambra State Independent Electoral Commission (ANSIEC) as well as other activities regarding the election including the transmission of results. The audience often form their perception of issues and the media credibility based on how such issues are reported. The implication is that the way broadcast media stations covered the 2024 Anambra State election has continued to attract lots of commentaries from the public which could affect audience retention and perception. Therefore, to the best of the researchers knowledge, empirical evidence on Anambra residents’ knowledge and perception of broadcast media coverage of 2024 local government elections seems unavailable despite the high level of importance of such engagement. This constituted a critical knowledge gap which this article is set to addressed.

Broadcast media have a reputation for having a significant impact on the populace, particularly with how individuals participate in the electoral. The mass media can impact our cognitive processes. Some related studies have been carried out on elections and media, such as Nnaane (2024), Zannu, Talabi, Aderibigbe, Bello, Okunade, Aiyesimoju, Olley and Ogah, (2024), Ezegwu, Ezeji, Chukwuemeka & Chime-Nganya (2024) etc. None of these studies evaluated the knowledge and perception of broadcast media coverage of the 2024 local government elections in Anambra state. Residents of the state under study depended heavily on the media for news. This allows them to create ideologies and make informed decisions based on the information relayed by the media. In light of the above, this study seeks to examine the following;

1. Find out the level of exposure and knowledge of the residents to broadcast media coverage of 2024 local government elections in Anambra State
2. Ascertain the media channels through which the residents accessed the coverage.
3. Find out how Anambra residents perceive the broadcast media coverage.
4. Determine the level of effectiveness of the broadcast media coverage of the 2024 local government election.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research work is anchored on two theories namely: Agenda setting and the perception theories.

## Agenda Setting Theory

Historically, Walter Lippmann coined agenda-setting theory in 1922, Cohen developed it using his epigram in 1963 and McCombs and Shaw popularized it in 1972 after they researched the 1968 presidential election of America. This theory suggests that media set the agenda for what people should be concerned about. Therefore, the way the media presents issues determines the amount of importance the society will attach to them. According to Lipmann (1922 in Popoola, 2015). The media help to put pictures in our heads”.

Asemah, Nwammuo, & Nwam-Uwaoma (2017) note that most of the things we think and worry about are based on the things we are exposed to in the media. The theory assumed that the media are not always successful at telling the public what to think but they are quite successful at telling them what to think about. The theorists submitted that readers, viewers, or listeners learn not only about a particular issue but how much importance to attach to such issues from the amount of information in a news story.. This theory is suitable for this study because the level of awareness created by the broadcast media on the 2024 Anambra local government election, determines how knowledgeable the residents of the state will know about it.

## Perception Theory

The perception theory is applied when people interpret media messages to agree with their already-held beliefs and judgments. The perception theory was propounded in 1960 by Klapper It is absolutely one of the limited effects theories that show how individuals perceive things differently as a result of their different cognitive structures of needs, perceptions, beliefs values, attitudes, skills, etc. According to the theory, perception is the process by which individuals select, organize, and interpret inputs to create a meaningful picture of the world. Perception, according to Nwaoboli, & Asemah (2023), is the process by which humans perceive sensory data that is made available by their five senses.

Perception is understood as the process of obtaining knowledge through the senses; to receive impressions by means of bodily organs; to take cognizance of the existence, character or identity of something by means of the senses, to see, hear or feel (Ngene, 2016 cited in Nwodu, Okorie and Iheanyichukeu, 2024).In other words, perception requires exposure to stimuli, as well as a specific level of attention paid to the stimuli, before the stimuli are understood by the audience Ezinwa (2014 as cited in Ezegwu, Obilichi, Agbasimelo, & Omokhapue, 2021).

## Role of Mass Media in the Electoral Process

The media are essential to democracy, and a democratic election is impossible without media. A free and fair election is not only about the freedom to vote and the knowledge of how to cast a vote but also about a participatory process where voters engage in public debate and have adequate information about parties, policies, candidates and the election process itself in order to make informed choices.

The numerous ways in which media ensure democratic electoral processes generally fall into the following categories:

### Media act as watchdog

In today’s politics and society at large, media is essential to the safeguarding transparency of the democratic process. This is often called its ‘watchdog’ role. Transparency is required on many levels including for access to information, accountability and legitimacy of individuals, institutions, and processes themselves, and rightful participation and public debate.

### Media as a campaign platform

Election campaigns are one of the channels through which political parties perform their statutory functions. Albert (2019) as cited in Umar (2020) are marked that elections play a significant role in deepening democracy in many parts of the world in the sense that they enable the governed to decide who governs them. Campaigns are one of the electoral activities through which political parties struggle to capture state powers.

## **Media as a platform and public voice**

In this role, the media provide an outlet for political parties and candidates to communicate their messages to the public. When acting as a platform, the media provide a forum for candidates to debate one another and present their ideas to the public. In this role, media impact our political views and opinions. The media also provide a platform for the public to convey their political thoughts and feelings, mostly through the use of social media. In this way, the media serve as a public voice, meaning the media provide an open forum for public debate and discussion.

## **Voter Education**

The media can educate citizens through stories that adequately explain the national situation (political social and economic) so that the citizenry will not only benefit from improved service delivery but will also take part in the development processes of the nation.

## **Placing a high premium on in-depth investigative journalism by mass media**

This will guarantee critical, fair, objective, balanced and accurate interpretation of electoral issues. Nwodu (2003 cited in Ogbodo et al, 2021) states that objective analysis of substantive political issues based on investigative journalism will further guide the electorate to make wise voting decisions. The mass media should carry out special focus on all categories of political candidates' fair or foul antecedents to the electorate who will now have a brighter understanding of those seeking their mandate.

## **Political mobilization role During Elections**

Mobilization simply means the act of fostering social cohesion and awareness that permit active involvement in public life. It provides a common pool of knowledge that enables individuals to operate as effective members of society in their lives. Ochonogor & Ukaegbu (2010 cited in Zannu, et al 2024) see mobilization as the process by which people in society are aware of what ways they are different from others.

## **Empirical Reviews**

Nnaane (2024) explored the comparative study of social media and political mobilisation in the 2021 and 2023 Presidential elections in the Gambia and Nigeria. The focus of this research was to compare the effectiveness of social media as a tool for political mobilisation in two distinct electoral contexts: the Gambia and Nigeria. The objectives included analysing the differences in social media usage between the two countries, assessing its impact on voter turnout and identifying the unique challenges faced by each nation in the context of political mobilisation through digital platforms. Nnaane applied the Diffusion of Innovations Theory to frame the study, suggesting that social media adoption and its effectiveness in mobilising political action varied significantly based on contextual factors.

The comparative approach employed by Nnaane's (2024) research is different from the current study which focused on Anambra residents' knowledge and perception of broadcast media coverage of the 2024 local government election. Although, the current study provides a broader understanding of broadcast media coverage of local government election, especially in south eastern state of Anambra. Nnaane's (2024) study employed one theory which was diffusion of innovations theory, unlike the current study which employed two theories.

Ezegwu, Ezeji, Chukwuemeka & Chime-Nganya (2024) assessed Abuja residents' perception of mass media coverage of the 2023 Presidential election campaign in Nigeria. The objectives of the study were to determine the extent to which Abuja residents were exposed to mass media coverage of the 2023 presidential election campaign in Nigeria and find out Abuja residents' perception of mass media coverage of the 2023 Presidential election campaign. The researchers used a survey research method. The researcher found that the majority of Abuja residents were highly exposed to mass media coverage of the 2023 presidential election campaign in Nigeria. Further findings revealed that 38% of the respondents perceived mass media as less effective in the coverage of the 2023 presidential election.

On the other hand, Oladimeji (2024) examined new media consumption, electorate's political participation and candidates' preference during the 2019 presidential election in Oyo State, Nigeria. This study focused on the relationship between new media consumption and its effects on political participation and candidate preference among voters in Oyo State during the 2019 elections. The primary objectives included assessing how different forms of new media influenced voter behaviour and preferences and exploring the implications of media consumption patterns on electoral outcomes. Oladimeji (2024) utilised uses and gratifications theory, which posits that individuals actively seek out media that fulfills specific needs, to frame his analysis.

Nwaoboli, & Ajibulu (2023) carried out a content-analytical study of the Vanguard newspaper's online coverage of the 2023 Nigerian Presidential election in Nigeria. The objectives of the study were to examine the tones and frames used by the Vanguard newspaper (online) in the coverage of the 2023 Nigerian presidential election. The researchers adopted a content analysis research design and the researchers analyzed 136 news reports and found out that The Vanguard newspaper (online) majorly used the attack tone and strategy frame to report the campaign issues to the public.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study was designed as a survey and the area of study were three selected local government areas across the three senatorial districts in Anambra State of Nigeria. They are Aguata, Awka South, and Onitsha North local government areas. The population of this study, therefore, were the registered voters in Aguata, Awka South, and Onitsha North local government areas during the 2024 Anambra State local government election, which is three hundred and thirty-five thousand, five hundred and thirty-two (335,532) people based on Anambra State Independent Electoral Commission (ANSIEC) 2024 updated register. The choice of these three local government areas across the three senatorial districts was because they had several voters in Anambra State, according to ANSIEC. The breakdown shows that the population of registered voters in Aguata is 100,083, Awka South is 118,117 while Onitsha South has 117, 332 registered voters in the 2024 Anambra State local government election according to Anambra State Independent Electoral Commission (ANSIEC). The sum total of the registered voters in the selected local government areas were 335, 532. The sample size for the study was 384 and it was derived using Krejcie and Morgan sample size determination formula. Purposive and convenience sampling techniques were used. Purposive sampling technique was also used to select three major local government areas that have large number of voters. They are Aguata (Anambra South), Awka South (Anambra Central), and Onitsha North (Anambra North). In Aguata local government areas, the following towns were selected: Ekwulobia and Isuofia. In Awka South, the following towns were selected; Amawbia, and Ifite-Awka. While in Onitsha North, the following towns were also selected; Inland town and Transi Nkisi GRA.

These selections were based on the fact that they are towns considered to have people who could provide reliable information on the subject matter and there are a lot of literate residents there, who are assumed to have followed the broadcast media coverage of the 2024 Anambra local government election.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

Out of the 384 copies distributed, 369 copies were retrieved. Research question one was posed to find out the level of exposure and knowledge of the residents to broadcast media coverage of the 2024 local government elections. The study found that a greater number 271 (73%) of respondents are exposed and knowledgeable about the 2024 Anambra local government election.

This shows that the broadcast media played a significant role in disseminating information and shaping public opinion on the 2024 local government elections. This finding is consistent with previous research on the role of mass media in shaping public opinion and policy decisions. For example, a study by Asemah & Nwaoboli (2023) found that media coverage can have a significant impact on public opinion and policy outcomes. Asemah & Asogwa (2016) aver that broadcasting enables a broadcast station to reach out to people located in different locations and with different demographics and psychographic make-up.

Research question two sought to ascertain the broadcast media channels through which Anambra residents

accessed coverage of the local government election in the State. Findings revealed that most of the respondents representing 132 (36%) and 73 (22%) respectively, accessed the 2024 local government elections through Anambra State Broadcasting Service and Radio Sapientia FM Onitsha. Riepe (2023) notes one of the most significant positive impacts of broadcasting is its ability to disseminate information to a vast and diverse audience. Broadcasting has played a vital role in informing people about current events, political developments, and social issues. News broadcasts have been the primary source of information for people, allowing them to stay informed about what is happening in the world. This has helped to create a more informed and engaged citizenry, which is essential for the functioning of a healthy democracy.

Research question three seeks to know how the respondents perceived the broadcast media coverage of the 2024 local government election. It was found that 54% of the respondents had a positive perception of broadcast media coverage of the 2024 Anambra State local government.

This result corroborates the position of agenda-setting theory. According to Asemah, Nwammuo, & Nwam-Uwaoma (2017), the theory proposes that the media reveal what kind of things people discuss, think worry about that are capable of shaping their lives and society. Agenda-setting theory implies that the media predetermine what issues are regarded as important at any given time in a chosen society.

The researchers also seek to discover the level of effectiveness of the broadcast media coverage of the 2024 local government election in Anambra State. It was found that the effectiveness of the broadcast media in the coverage of the 2024 local government elections was rated high by the respondents with over 36% of the respondents affirming this. On the contrary, Ezegwu, Ezeji, Chukwuemeka & Chime-Nganya (2024) found that 38% of the respondents perceived mass media as less effective in the coverage of the 2023 presidential election. The finding also supports the perception theory. Perception theory was propounded in 1960 by Klapper (Asemah, Nwammuo & Nkwam-Uwaoma, 2017), it is one of the limited effects theories that show how individuals perceive things differently as a result of their different cognitive structures of needs, perceptions, beliefs, values, attitudes, and skills

## CONCLUSION

Media are essential to democracy, and a democratic election is impossible without media. The electorate generally relies on the broadcast media during electioneering campaign periods to provide the needed information for them to make informed decisions. The mass media through their traditional role of informing, enlightening, educating, and entertaining, can meet the information needs of the electorate. By serving as a link between the political parties/candidates and the electorate, the broadcast media plays a major role during the election process. Therefore, the study concludes that a greater number of the respondents were highly exposed to and knowledgeable about the 2024 Anambra local government election. The study maintained that most of the respondents accessed the 2024 local government elections through Anambra State Broadcasting Service and Radio Sapientia FM Onitsha. The study further concludes that the majority of the respondents had a good perception of broadcast media coverage of the 2024 Anambra State local government.

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