

Perception of Political Disenfranchisement and Intention to Vote Among Journalists in Southwest Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Political franchise should be a fundamental right of any eligible voter during elections in democratic governance. That is why many international conventions theoretically recognise the rights of individuals to vote as inalienable. This research, however, observed that in practice, this right has consistently been denied some groups of people in Nigeria via systematic disenfranchisement occasioned by occupational and situational disadvantages. Prominent among such groups are journalists. In a democracy, journalists are assigned the watchdog role, in ensuring that no one is denied their rights, especially the right to vote and be voted for. Considering the seemingly, systematic disenfranchisement of some journalists during elections, it appears as though the watch dog cannot watch itself. This study is therefore undertaken to determine whether or not and to what extent journalists with the intention to vote are disenfranchised, mainly because of their profession. The cognitive engagement theory was used as the framework for the study. Survey research method was adopted while questionnaire is employed for data collection. The data were analysed quantitatively. Findings showed that some journalists with the intention to vote were disenfranchised due to their occupational responsibilities on election days in Nigeria's previous election circles. Further findings revealed that the affected journalists want the situation addressed before the next Nigeria's general elections. Based on the findings, the study recommended that special voting arrangements should be put in place by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to accommodate this special category of the Nigerian electorates.

Word Count: 243

KEY WORDS: Perception, Political franchise, Disenfranchisement, Election/Voting, Journalists.

INTRODUCTION

In liberal democratic theory, an election is a viable mechanism for consummating representative government and voting is the main form of political participation in democratic societies. Elections in democracies help to promote representation of popular will and to secure legitimacy of the political system (Obani & Odalonu, 2019). One of the key aspects of free and fair election is that every eligible voter who is willing to vote is given the opportunity to exercise his/her franchise. Voting is open to all citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria who are at least eighteen (18) years old. In other words, the constitution provides that every individual from 18 years and above has the right to support the political party of their choice. Voting, in the opinion of Lindell (2019), is a mechanism for citizens to express their preference for the political party they believe should govern the country, rather than forcing one group's choice on another.

Since 1999 when Nigeria returned to multi-party democracy after a long period of military rule, elections have been conducted on a stable basis. It is, however, important to note that the standard of these elections have been a major concern as they were bedeviled by several factors which include electoral fraud,

malpractices, intimidation of voters and electoral officials and election related violence. One of such major challenge affecting the standard of elections in Nigeria is low turnout of voters.

Oyuru (2023) pointed that there is enough evidence to suggest that voter turnout is declining globally, as evidenced by political indifference, lack of psychological interest in public affairs, an emotional distance from civic duties, and lack of political participation. In Nigeria, 52.3 percent of registered voters cast ballots in the 1999 elections, according to information from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) Voter Turnout Database (Adigun, 2020). This percentage increased to 69.1 percent in 2003 but has since been decreasing. It decreased from 69.1% in 2003 to 57.4% in 2007, 54.7% in 2007 to 53.7% in 2011, 53.7% in 2011 to 43.6% in 2015, and 43.6% in 2015 to 34.75% in the 2019 presidential election (Adigun, 2020). It dropped further from 34.75% to 26.72% in the 2023 presidential election (Amata, 2023).

Why do people vote? Why do they not vote? These are pertinent questions for this study. There have been serious concerns in the past few years that the citizens are disengaging from the political process, as shown by the persistent decline in voter turnout at all levels of elections. This leads to serious questions of legitimacy. If fewer than half of all eligible citizens vote and a winning candidate receive a little bit above 50% of the vote, what can we say about the mandate and the power to govern given to such leaders? Are non-voters completely disengaged, or simply engaged in other kinds of political activities that they find more satisfying and more likely to affect their lives? (Obani & Odalonu, 2019).

Among notable Nigerians who are usually systematically disenfranchised during elections are those carrying out essential duties. These set of people include electoral officials, security personnel, medical practitioners and journalists. One of the arguments for denying these sets of people their voting right is that it is a necessary and warranted measure for ensuring the neutrality of election administration. The view is that such a restriction is of negligible impact given the far more extensive power and influence they have over other areas of the election process outside of their own personal voting. Specifically, journalists in Nigeria often find it difficult to cast their ballot on election day due to their assigned official duties. The case of this group of electorates creates significant worries because of the critical roles they play in mobilising eligible voters for the performance of their civic obligations throughout the electioneering processes.

It should be noted that journalists have the same fundamental political rights as other citizens and should be allowed to exercise these rights. Any serious effort at electoral reforms to bring about free, fair and credible elections must take into account the challenges, especially of voter declining participation in the electoral process. Thus, it became imperative to conduct a study on the perception of political disenfranchisement and intention to vote among journalists, with a view to being adequately informed in designing future strategies to tackle the challenge in the Nigerian context.

Statement of the Problem

The right to participate in the democratic process is a fundamental political right, established by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. This right includes the right to vote in elections. These rights have been repeated in various other regional human rights instruments and political commitments and lie at the very foundation of democratic standards and ensuring that the will of the people is the basis for government.

Despite being an emerging democracy with series of successful electoral cycles since 1999, Nigeria continues to grapple with the challenge of low voter turnout in its general elections. The trend of voter turnout in general elections is critical in understanding the extent to which Nigeria has succeeded in addressing this challenge. This has undermined the quality of elections held in Nigeria in the various electoral cycles. The 2023 general elections saw no difference as there appear to be issues that must have propelled or caused a low voters' turnout and how this low voters' turnout has had a large impact on Nigerian elections.

Carrying out essential duties by journalists on election days has been observed to be a likely factor in recording low voting. Journalists are usually pre-occupied by their duties of monitoring and reporting activities

on election days. These do not give them the ample opportunity of exercising their political right. Voting should not be denied any eligible voter ready to do so for inclusivity, credibility and objectivity of the electoral process. This is mostly important for journalists because of their critical roles of promoting democratic ideals and values, which includes the right to vote.

The critical role journalists play in moulding public opinions, and fostering political engagements notwithstanding, there appear to be a paucity of research on how journalists in Southwest Nigeria perceive their own disenfranchisement, even when they have intentions to vote. Hence, this study on perception of political disenfranchisement and intention to vote among journalists in Southwest Nigeria.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Examine the level of interest to vote during elections among journalists in Southwest Nigeria.
2. Identify causes of political disenfranchisement among journalists in Southwest Nigeria.
3. Find out ways by which journalists in Southwest Nigeria can be made to vote during elections in Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of interest to vote during elections among journalists in Southwest Nigeria?
2. What are the causes of political disenfranchisement among journalists in Southwest Nigeria?
3. What are the ways by which journalists in Southwest Nigeria can be made to vote during elections in Nigeria?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Perception

Perception is a psychological process through which the experiences gained by the five senses of individuals can process responses from them into positive or negative attitudes. Such responses follow the stages of selection, interpretation, and reaction (Erin & Maharani, 2018). Otter cited in Ghadirian et al. (2017) described perception as a process of actions for acquiring information. That acquisition can stem from the environments to which people are exposed. Another definition from Nugroho in Saifuddin (2020) is that perception is a process that starts from the use of the five senses in receiving a stimulus, then it organises and interprets the stimulus so that it has an understanding of what is sensed.

Perception can also be interpreted as a process through which the brain embarks on the reception, interpretation, and organisation of sensory data from the environment for the creation of a structured, and comprehensive understanding of realities (Miftahul, 2017). According to Rahmat in Arifin et al. (2017) perception is about objects, events, or relationships obtained by inferring information from interpretation of messages. Whereas, according to Sugihartono in Arifin et al. (2017) perception is the ability of the senses to translate stimulus or the process to translate stimulus into human senses. In human perception, there is a difference in sensing something that is good or positive perception and negative perception that will affect the human action.

From the definitions above, it can be concluded that perception arises based on experience and feeling of each individual. Perception is a response owned by each individual through the process of sensing. Perception can also be expressed differently because individuals have varying emotions, thinking abilities, and experiences. As a result, when encountering the same stimulus, perception outcomes may differ from person to person. Therefore, perception of political disenfranchisement of journalists could also vary even among journalists themselves.

Election and Voting

Elections and voting are indispensable aspects of political engagement. “The most common form of political participation is exercising the right to vote” (Flanigan & Zingale 1998, p.6) in elections. Election is a basic component of a liberal democratic political system. This assertion is underscored by the fact that democratic representation is built on elections. It is in concert with this assertion that Flanigan and Zingale (1998) further conceptualise election as the formal mechanism by which citizens maintain or alter the existing political leadership. For these scholars therefore, two observations are necessary. First, periodic and competitive elections give ordinary citizens the power to offer continued support to, or rejection of, their elected leaders. Election therefore provides the electorate with the opportunity to evaluate, or make an assessment of leaders’ political performance, and to consequently pass their verdict. Secondly, elections and democratic representation are irrevocably imbricated with, and as a matter of fact, operate within the context of prevailing political values and beliefs that constitute the society’s political culture.

Oddih (2007) describes election as the formal process of selection of persons for public offices or accepting or registering a political proposition by voting. He states that election serves as a means by which a society may organise itself and make specified formal decisions, adding that where voting is free, it acts simultaneously as a system for making certain decisions regarding the power relation in a society, and as a method for seeking political obedience with a minimum of sacrifice of the individual freedoms.

Voting is one of the most commonly used terms in contemporary democratic politics concerning leadership recruitment. Zahida and Younis (2014) see voting as the function of electing representatives by casting votes in an election, in addition to the fact that citizens use voting as a means of expressing their approval or disapproval of government decisions, policies and programmes, the policies and programmes of various political parties and qualities of candidates who are engaged in the struggle to get the status of being representatives of the people.

Voting as a form of political participation takes place during election time majorly. However, participation at election time does not necessarily mean the most effective means of citizens’ influence. Though elections are a powerful means of citizens’ control over government officials, they are rather blunt instruments of control. For the individual or groups of citizens, the most important political activities may be those in the between-elections period, when citizens try to influence government decisions concerning specific problems that concern them. This way of thinking about political participation at least implicitly opened for analyses of activities that included not only voting behaviours but also, for example, demonstrations, strikes, boycotts, and other forms of protests (Ekman & Amna, 2009).

Political Disenfranchisement

Political disenfranchisement refers to the removal or denial of voting rights. It occurs when an individual or group is prevented from participating in the democratic process of choosing representatives who govern the affairs of their community (local government), state, or country. Okonkwo (2017), while noting that the right to vote is known as enfranchisement right, observes that it is at the base of electoral process with its root in ancient sociological philosophy. The right regarded as inalienable is espoused by international and regional conventions as well as judicial authorities in several jurisdictions. Thus, it can safely be inferred from the above submissions that the principle of equality guaranteed by the universal adult suffrage is the heart, soul, spirit and body of democracy.

Amanyie et al. (2015) note that the beauty of democracy depends not on the number of registered political parties in a country but rather on the degree of popular participation in the democratic process. Therefore, every citizen must play adequate role in the democratic process mainly in the area of selection of leaders and formulation of policies. According to Huntington (1991 as cited in Amanyie et al, 2015), a political system is democratic to the extent that its most powerful collective decision makers are selected through fair, honest and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for voters and in which virtually all adult population is eligible to vote.

Journalists and The Right to Vote

Journalists, just as all humans, have certain inalienable rights and also have certain responsibilities placed on them. Rights are predominately privileges granted to individuals by governing bodies, and are generally written into laws (Anyanwu et al., 2022). There is no gainsaying the fact that the right to vote encourages civic consciousness through political participation; as such, the right to vote is anchored on the tenets of democracy; and democracy is regarded as one of the universal core values and principles of the United Nations.

The universal adults' suffrage dictates that all who have attained adulthood in a political clime can vote and be voted for. However, as political awareness becomes more sophisticated, expansion in the opportunity to vote and be voted for began to assume new dimensions with a more inclusive political participation. Political alienation across economic power, race, gender and differences in term of physical, intellectual, emotional and psychological diversities begins to disappear giving room for more participation of citizens with reference to age in many countries of the world (Adeniyi & Olaotan, 2020).

As citizens, journalists are entitled to voting rights like any other individuals. However, there is ongoing debate about whether journalists can remain neutral during elections while exercising their right to vote. Critics have argued that a core journalistic value is objectivity, and voting in elections that involves aligning with a political party or candidate compromises the public perception of a journalist's neutrality. Every four years the journalism profession has this argument. Whenever elections draw near, these disagreements are always heating up among those who advocate for participation of journalists, even if there is a public record of affiliation, and those who believe journalists should willingly sacrifice their right to vote in primaries for the sake of keeping their politics private.

According to McBride (2020), there are two key issues when journalists publicly disclose their political affiliations through voting. The smaller issue is that an individual reporter's political leanings may be exposed, potentially leading critics to question their impartiality. This could cause some members of the audience to doubt the reporter's commitment to balance and fairness in his reportorial assignments. However, it is important to remember that journalistic objectivity is rooted in the process, not the individual. If the reporter's work maintains high standards, such criticism is likely to be limited. The larger issue arises when the political inclinations of an entire newsroom are revealed, highlighting the failure of some media organisations to recruit a politically diverse staff. This is a significant problem, especially if the collective views of the newsroom differ significantly from those of the population they serve (McBride, 2020).

Shepard (2008) avers that it may seem like a silly sacrifice not to vote or declare political allegiance by a journalist. But it is not. In choosing to become a journalist, one gives up a certain degree of participation in the public space because journalists' credibility is their most important asset. Certainly, journalists have political leanings. But they need to keep their views to themselves and bend over backwards to be impartial. A listener has a right to expect that reporters who are covering election campaigns are not advocating for a candidate but simply providing accurate and fair information. If a reporter covering one candidate had a lawn full of signs of support for that candidate, or for an opponent, would a listener not rightly question his or her impartiality? The same holds true for journalists making campaign contributions, especially since political contributions are public records. However, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2023) argued that it is important that journalists be granted early voting privileges because they too should be able to exercise their right to vote.

Theoretical Framework

The cognitive engagement theory, which is the advance form of cognitive mobilisation theory, talks about how individuals are willing and able to learn about politics, which eventually leads to participation (Abdulrauf et al., 2015). It involves the amount of efforts youths are willing to invest in seeking to participate in politics and how long they persist (Charles, 2010). Ronald F. Inglehart propounded Cognitive Engagement Theory in 1977 (Abdulrauf et al. 2015), which basically meant that political participation is affected by better-educated youths who have increased access to information. Here, it enunciates the individual's education, access to information, political knowledge, political interest, and policy satisfaction in the polity. The perspective of voting during

elections embodies two different trends. First is the decrease in the cost of acquiring information; second, the increase in youth's ability to process political information which enhances participation.

The cognitive engagement theory proposes that an individual's political participation is as a result of his education, access to information, political interest, political knowledge and policy satisfaction (Inglehart, 1977). Thus, the theory is based on the assumption that the more educated citizens a society have, the better informed they will be and in the long run the more they will participate in politics to show their satisfaction with government policies. Also, the lesser the cost of access to information, the more citizens consume information from the media and the higher the level of political knowledge and interest among citizens which further leads to increase in political participation (Charles, 2010).

This means that youths will have more political resources to deal with political issues and understand how democracy works in their society when they form part of the voting strength. Consequently, using cognitive engagement theory has helped to clarify differing results as it contains variables such as access to political information, political knowledge, voting, political interest, and policy satisfaction, which better explains the concept of youth voting as a form of political participation during elections, hence decreasing the inconsistencies experienced in previous research (Abdulrauf, et al. 2015).

Research Methodology

Survey method involving the administration of questionnaire was used for the study. The copies of questionnaire printed were shared among the sample size drawn from the population for the study. The population for the study was made up of all journalists in Southwest Nigeria. The population figure was sourced through the various councils of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) in the states making up the geo-political zone. It must be noted that the figure should have been sourced from the national secretariat of the NUJ if the union had gotten a current register of journalists in the country. However, since the national secretariat of the union is just working on the updating of the register done years ago, the best option is resorting to the state councils which keep record of their financial members. The figures as given by the state councils are:

Table 1: Population of registered journalists across the six states in Southwest, Nigeria

State	No. of NUJ Members
Osun	325
Oyo	473
Ekiti	295
Ondo	350
Ogun	412
Lagos	5,025
Total	6,800

Source: NUJ chapters in Southwest, Nigeria

Using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size table, three hundred and sixty-one (361) sample sizes were drawn from the population of six thousand, eight hundred (6,800). Multi-stage sampling was employed in the selection of respondents that make up the sample size. First, the six states of the geo political zone were stratified into three groups based on political history and territorial contiguity. The outcome is as follows:

- i. Lagos/Ogun
- ii. Osun/Oyo
- iii. Ekiti/Ondo

Again, one state was purposively selected from each of the three stratifications. They are Ogun, Osun and Ondo. This was done for ease of accessibility considering time and available resources. The sample size of three hundred and sixty-one (361) was selected from journalists in the three states. Data collected from the respondents through the questionnaire was analysed and interpreted using the SPSS statistical package version 23 whereby data were presented in figures and tables.

Data Analysis and Discussion

In conducting the survey part of this research work, 361 copies of questionnaire were distributed to journalists but 291 copies were properly filled and returned representing 81% response rate. This rate, according to Groves and Peycheva (2008), is justifiable as it includes the responses of majority of the respondents. The data are presented below:

Table2: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	181	62.2
female	110	37.8
Total	291	100.0
Qualification		
SSCE	4	1.4
ND/NCE	103	35.4
HND/BSC	168	57.7
MSc	16	5.5
PhD	-	-
Total	291	100.0
Duration of journalism practice		
Less than 5 years	18	6.2
5-10 years	199	68.4
10 years and above	74	25.4
Total	291	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 2 shows that the sample is skewed towards male respondents, with males making up nearly two-thirds (62.2%) of the respondents, while females constitute about one-third (37.8%). This suggests a gender imbalance in the population, with men being more represented. Also, majority of the respondents had higher education qualifications. Specifically, 57.7% held a Higher National Diploma (HND) or Bachelor's degree (BSc); 35.4% held a National Diploma (ND) or National Certificate in Education (NCE); Postgraduate qualifications (MSc) were less common, with only 5.5% having attained this level of education; while the number of respondents with only secondary school certificates (SSCE) was quite low (1.4%), and no respondents held a PhD. A smaller portion of the respondents (6.2%) had relatively limited experience, with less than 5 years of journalism practice. Most respondents (68.4%) had moderate experience (5-10 years), while 25.4% had 10 years or more of experience in the field. This indicates that the majority of the sample consisted of journalists with significant experience, while a smaller subset was early-career journalists.

Table 3: Level of Interest to vote during elections among Journalists in South West

Responses		Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Total (%)
	I often show interest in voting during elections in Nigeria	69 (23.7%)	153 (52.6%)	4 (1.4%)	45 (15.5%)	20 (6.9%)	291 (100%)
	I am allowed to vote as a journalist during elections in Nigeria	71 (24.4%)	136 (46.7%)	24 (8.2%)	44 (15.1%)	16 (5.5%)	291 (100.0)
	I feel comfortable not voting in elections as a journalist	- -	6 (2.1%)	130 (44.7%)	147 (50.5%)	8 (2.7%)	291 (100.0)

Source: Field Survey, 2024

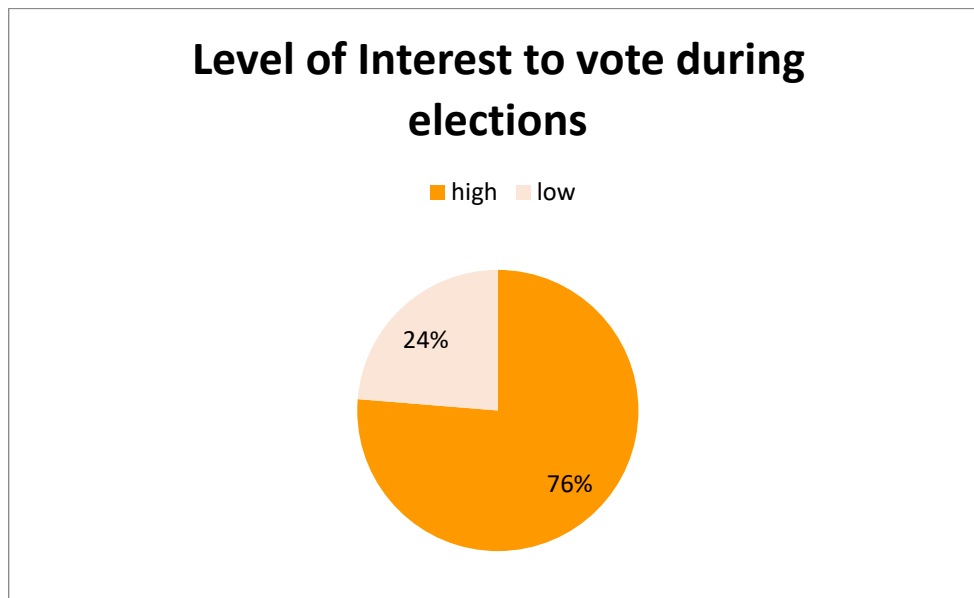


Figure 3.1 Level of Interest to vote during elections

Figure 3.1, revealed the level of interest to vote during elections among the respondents. Sixty-nine participants which represents 23.7% of the respondents strongly agreed that they showed high interest in voting during elections, One hundred and fifty-three participants representing 52.6% agreed that they showed high interest in voting during elections. The cumulative percentage of respondents that showed high interest in voting is 76.3%. On the other hand, four respondents representing 1.4% strongly disagreed that they showed interest in voting during polls and forty-five respondents which represents 15.5% disagreed that they showed interest during polls. The cumulative percentage of respondents that showed low interest for voting is 16.9%. Twenty respondents representing 6.9% were undecided. The results inferred that the majority of the respondents, 76.3% demonstrated high interest in voting during elections whereas 16.9% did not while 6.9% were undecided.

The findings in Table 3 show that a majority of respondents (76.3%) reported that they often showed interest in voting during elections, indicating a high level of enthusiasm for participating in the electoral process. Only 16.9% disagreed, suggesting that the proportion of journalists with low interest in voting was relatively small. In addition, 71.1% of respondents stated that they were allowed to vote as journalists during elections, implying that most did not feel professionally restricted from exercising their voting rights. However, 2.1% agreed that they were not allowed to vote, which may indicate professional limitations in some contexts, while 5.5% were undecided.

Furthermore, an overwhelming majority (95.2%) disagreed with the statement that they felt comfortable not voting as journalists. This suggests that most respondents were uncomfortable with the idea of missing the opportunity to vote, reflecting a strong sense of civic responsibility. Only 2.1% agreed with the statement. Overall, the results indicate that journalists in Southwest Nigeria exhibit strong interest in voting and generally believe they are able to participate in elections. They also express discomfort with the possibility of not voting due to professional duties, underscoring the importance they attach to electoral participation.

Table 4: Causes of political disenfranchisement among Journalists in Southwest, Nigeria

Responses		Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Total (%)
	I do not have opportunities to vote because of my professional schedule on election days	81 (27.8%)	112 (38.5%)	30 (10.3%)	51 (17.5%)	17 (5.8%)	291 (100%)
	No special arrangements for journalists in Nigeria to allow them vote in elections due to their busy schedule on election days	102 (35.1%)	156 (53.6%)	11 (3.8%)	16 (5.5%)	6 (2.1%)	291 (100.0)
	The fact that I am always assigned to cover elections outside of where I registered as a voter prevents me from voting	91 (31.3%)	151 (51.9%)	10 (3.4%)	29 (10.0%)	10 (3.4%)	291 (100.0)

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 4 further reveals that 66.3% of respondents reported not having opportunities to vote on election days due to their professional schedules. This suggests that work-related demands significantly limit journalists' ability to participate in elections. About 27.8% disagreed, while 5.8% were undecided, pointing to the role of time constraints and election-day assignments in hindering voting.

A substantial majority (88.7%) agreed that no special arrangements were made to assist journalists in voting despite their busy schedules, indicating a perceived lack of institutional support. Only 9.3% disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 2.1% were undecided. Additionally, 83.2% agreed that being assigned to cover elections outside their registered voting areas prevented them from voting. This highlights a major structural barrier, as journalists are often deployed to locations different from where they are registered to vote. Only 13.4% disagreed, and 3.4% were undecided.

Overall, the data suggest that journalists' professional responsibilities significantly hinder their ability to vote. The lack of special voting arrangements and the frequent assignment to cover elections outside their registered polling areas further exacerbate the problem. These findings demonstrate the logistical and systemic challenges that limit journalists' ability to exercise their voting rights, despite their strong interest in participating in elections.

Table 5: Ways in Which Journalists in Southwest, Nigeria can be made to vote during elections in Nigeria

Responses		Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Total (%)
	INEC should make arrangements for absentee voting for journalist to vote ahead of election	79 (27.1%)	122 (41.9%)	12 (4.1%)	66 (22.7%)	12 (4.1%)	291 (100%)

	There should be arrangements for early morning voting to allow journalists vote before the commencement of election on election days	83 (28.5%)	149 (51.2%)	8 (2.7%)	39 (13.4%)	12 (4.1%)	291 (100.0)
	Electoral laws should be amended to allow special electorates such as journalists cast their votes anywhere on the day of election	174 (59.8%)	89 (30.6%)	3 (1.0%)	16 (5.5%)	9 (3.1%)	291 (100.0)

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 5 indicates that a majority of respondents (69%) agreed that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should introduce arrangements for absentee voting to enable journalists to vote ahead of election day. This demonstrates a strong preference for alternative voting mechanisms that would better align with journalists' demanding work schedules. However, 26.8% rejected this suggestion, possibly due to concerns about feasibility, logistics, or the integrity of such a system.

Similarly, a substantial proportion of respondents (79.7%) reported that provisions should be made for early morning voting to allow journalists to cast their ballots before election coverage begins. This reflects widespread support for a time-based solution that accommodates both their civic obligations and professional duties. Only 16.1% expressed disagreement, suggesting minimal resistance to the idea.

Furthermore, an overwhelming majority (90.4%) claimed that electoral laws should be amended to allow special categories of workers, including journalists, to vote from any location on election day. This reveals strong consensus in favor of more flexible and accessible voting options for professionals who are often required to work outside their registered polling areas. Only 6.5% disagreed, indicating very limited opposition.

On the whole, the analysis shows robust support for absentee and flexible voting arrangements among journalists. Many respondents favor absentee or early morning voting as practical measures that would enable them to participate in elections without compromising their work responsibilities. Additionally, the broad endorsement of amending electoral laws highlights a strong desire for reforms that would facilitate more inclusive and flexible voting practices for journalists. These findings underscore journalists' strong commitment to voting and their desire for electoral systems that better accommodate the realities of their profession.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study it has been established that there was a significant level of interest in participating in elections among journalists in Southwest Nigeria. Despite their keen awareness of their civic rights and responsibilities, many journalists were unable to vote due to the demands of their professional duties on election days. These duties often prevent them from physically going to their designated polling units, thereby depriving them of the opportunity to exercise their right to vote. This situation has led to widespread discomfort among journalists, as no special provisions have been made by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to enable them to vote while fulfilling their professional obligations. To address this issue, the journalists believed that the electoral laws in Nigeria should be revised to accommodate essential workers, such as journalists, by allowing them to cast their votes on election days. This could involve special provisions such as absentee voting, early morning voting, or the ability to vote anywhere, to ensure that journalists can exercise their voting rights without compromising their professional responsibilities. Such measures would ensure that journalists, who play a critical role in the electoral process, are not disenfranchised due to the nature of their work.

Recommendations

The recommends that:

- The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should push for the amendment of electoral laws by the National Assembly to allow essential workers, including journalists, to vote from any location on election days. This would ensure that professionals with demanding roles are not disenfranchised.
- INEC should establish early voting specifically for journalists and other essential workers. This would allow them to vote before the actual election day.
- Mobile voting units could be deployed to key locations where journalists and other essential workers are stationed during elections. This would bring voting closer to them, ensuring they do not miss out due to logistical challenges.
- Opportunities for online voting that will allow journalists to vote virtually wherever they are should be provided by the INEC to allow journalists to cast their ballots.
- Journalists and civil society organisations should advocate for policy changes that prioritize voting rights for essential workers. Awareness campaigns would highlight the need for reforms and build public and institutional support for these changes.

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