

Imo State Youths' Perception of the Influence of Radio Nigeria “Politics Nation-Wide” Programme on Permanent Voters Card Collection (PVC)

¹Orji, Uchenna Franklin, ²Okolie, Uloma Rosemary & ³Ezike, Francisca Ujunwa

^{1&2}Department of Mass Communication, Imo State Polytechnic, Omuma

³Department of Mass Communication, University of the Gambia

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Abstract

The study examined Imo State youths' perception of the influence of Radio Nigeria “Politics Nation-Wide” programme on Permanent Voters' Card collection (PVC). This study was anchored on Agenda Setting theory. In this study, descriptive survey research method was employed to sample the view of youths in Imo State on the influence of Radio Nigeria “Politics Nation-Wide” programme on Permanent Voters' Card collection (PVC) among youths of Imo State. A sample size of 385 was drawn from the population of registered electorate in Southeast. Multi-stage sampling technique was used for this study. Questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection. Data obtained were analyzed using mean value. Findings revealed Imo State youth's level of exposure to Radio Nigeria Politics Nation-wide” programme is high at 50.8%. Also, exposure to Radio Nigeria “Politics Nation-wide” programme influenced electorate's attitude towards the collection of PVC positively with an average mean score of 3.11. However, social media; opinion leaders; friends/relatives; television; newspapers and GSM political messages were mostly the other factors that influenced Imo State youth's participation in the collection of PVC with mean score of 3.37. In conclusion radio political programmes have significantly influenced Imo State youth's attitude towards the registration and collection of the PVCs. Therefore, election umpire in Nigeria and Imo State in particular should adopt multi-dimensional communication approach to reach out to the people as no medium is exhaustively enough to change political apathy towards PVCs collection.

Keywords: *Influence, Perception, Politics, Permanent voters' card, Radio Nigeria*

Corresponding Author: Orji, Uchenna Franklin

Background the Study

The collection of Permanent Voters' Card (PVC) has become an issue of public debates. This is because most of the youths at federal, states and local government areas are reluctant and unwillingly to collect their voters' card at the designated points in Nigeria (PM News, 2018). The resonating lamentations in recent weeks by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) over the low collection rate of the Permanent Voters' Cards (PVCs) in many states of the federation have not only become a source of worry but also a threat to the 2023 general elections that are only a few weeks away. The fact that the PVCs have been produced by the commission but are not being collected by registered voters makes the matter appear complex. It also sounds ridiculous that the lamentations over PVC collection are rather coming from the country's electoral body.

The INEC recently raised the alarm that no fewer than 6.7 million Nigerians are yet to collect their PVCs in 17 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Of this figure, 2.1m PVCs are in Lagos and Abuja as at December 29, 2022; with over 1.6m unclaimed PVCs in Lagos State. A document from the commission categorises the uncollected PVCs in Lagos State into 916,961 old cards and 777,002 new cards. Meanwhile, 460,643 PVCs were uncollected in 11 years in the FCT. To address the situation, the INEC has devolved PVC collection to registration areas and wards across the 774 LGA offices of the commission in the country. The INEC National Commissioner and Chairman, Information and Voter Education Committee, Festus Okoye, said beginning January 15, 2023, the exercise will revert to the LGA offices of the commission until January 22, 2023, which is the last day for PVC collection. To ease collection, INEC has made provisions for PVC collection centres to remain open from 9am to 3pm daily, including Saturdays and Sundays. The Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, has released a final 93 million voter list of eligible voters for the 2023 general Elections. It was observed that the North-West and South-West regions have the highest number of registered voters. The North-West geopolitical zone has the highest number of registered voters with 22,255,562. The South-West has 17,958,966 and the North-Central now has 15,363,731. Furthermore, the South-South has 14,440,714 registered voters and the North-East currently has 12,542,429 while the Imo State has 10,907,606.

It is believed that various actors and stakeholders are crucial in any electoral process. These involve: Election Management Bodies (like INEC and ISIEC), political parties and contestants, the media, the judiciary, the security agencies, the legislative assemblies, the accredited observers and the youths. However, the most impertinent of them all is the youths. It is an incontrovertible fact that any preparation without the embodiment of the youths also referred to as voters makes the entire exercise a failure. This is simply because, where there is no youths there will be no voting, sorting, counting, collation, announcement of results and the declaration of winners (Ojo,2018). The mobilization of the youths in the electoral process by party chairmen, media practitioners, members of civil society organisations, traditional rulers and religious leaders would assist the commission in capturing many eligible voters in next year general elections. Hence the need for media practitioners to initiate more enlightenment programmes that would educate the people on the need to get registered and also collect their PVCs.

This is because the youths are the future of every nation and as such their interest or lack of it in the political affairs of a country become paramount concern. The history of Nigeria is not complete without mentioning the roles that youths played in the years leading to the independence of the country. In recent times however, the issue of political apathy among Nigeria youths has become worrisome (Ajodo-Adebanjoko, 2019). It is on record that no election had a lower participation rate in the six decades of Nigeria's independence than the 2023 general election where out of the 93.4 million registered voters, 87.2 million people collected their Permanent Voters Card while the total number of voters on election day was only 24.9 million (Premiumtimesng, com, 2023). Radio as a medium of mass communication informs, educates and entertains. Beyond these roles, it also persuades and mobilises. Radio has the capacity to create awareness and knowledge about issues. The knowledge of this will help in attitudinal change of the audience. Umechukwu (as cited in Ochonogor & Omega, 2011) observe that radio played important role in creating awareness, interpretation of issues, personalities, programmes and educating the people, purposely to ginger, encourage and motivate them to exercise their political right and take informed political decisions such decisions will basically include participating in the collection of Permanent Voters Card. This is because radio played crucial role in the mobilisation of the voters in the 2019 general elections in Nigeria. It provides the electorate with information about the voting process, party manifestoes and background information about the candidates standing for elective positions (Onyiriuka, Orji, & Sabestine, 2020).

In spite of the presence of Radio Nigeria “Politics Nationwide” programme in Nigeria and Imo State in particular, the level of participation in the registration and collection of Permanent Voters Card among youths in Imo State appears to be very low. This could be as a result of low level of political awareness among the youths on the need for the collection of their Permanent Voters Card. The question is: Does exposure to Radio Nigeria “Politics Nationwide” programme influence Imo State youth participation in the collection of Permanent Voters' Card?

Research Questions

The following research questions are raised to guide this study

1. To what extent are Imo State youth aware of PVC collection through exposure Radio Nigeria “Politics Nation-wide” programme?
2. How has exposure to Radio Nigeria “Politics Nation-wide” programme influence Imo State youths' attitude towards the collection of PVC?
3. What other factors influenced Imo State youth participation in the collection of PVC?

Literature Review

In Nigeria, by the virtue of Section 2 B (1) of the Electoral Act of 2010 (as amended), The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is saddled with responsibility of conducting voter registration and elections in the country. However, INEC alone cannot shoulder this herculean task without the engagement of other stakeholders. Over the years, INEC in collaboration with other stakeholders from both public and private domains– like National Orientation Agency (NOA), Civil Society Organisations (CSO's), political parties, religious organisations, local, national, regional and international Non- governmental

Organisations (NGO's) and a host of other bodies to offer the electorate with required information about voter registration, collection of Permanent Voter's Cards, and Continuous Voters Registration Exercise.

Political awareness is defined as the knowledge about political events such as campaigns, parties, elections, and salient issues. It is all about indicating the people on the need to participate politically (Abdo-Katsipis, 2017). Political awareness simply implies one's sensitivity about politics and everything that has to do with political activities such as electioneering and electoral process. Political awareness is very crucial especially in a democratic setting and it is important to ascertain in most cases nexus through which the citizens are in-tune with all the happenings within and outside them environ at appreciable level (Kombo, 2014). A hand full of studies have been carried out on the impact of mass media advertising on political behaviour are found to be significantly positive. According to Adedotun (2018), grassroots mobilisation efforts through the mass media can raise voter turnout while more impersonal tactics such as direct mail seem ineffective. The media (radio) is a platform for creating political awareness amongst the public. Radio programmes informs, educates and enlightens the public on political issues. It is evident that news and current affairs programmes are used to discuss political matters arising, interpret such issues for the audience to make informed choices and decisions. By so doing, political awareness is created and the people involved are in a better position to take necessary action. According to Iheanacho and Orji (2022) exposure to radio influenced respondents' participation in the political processes. Mboho (as cited in Adedotun, 2018) categorically identified the political functions of the media providing an avenue for the promotion of political awareness and civic responsibilities among the people as well as mobilizing them toward the realization of national goals.

Empirical Studies

In a study, Okolie (2015) concluded that radio political messages lead to voters' participation in a democratic society. Again, Ochnogor and Amadi (2019) x-rayed the interactive broadcast programmes and citizens' participation in the 2015 general elections: A study of audiences in Rivers State, South-South Nigeria. The researchers found that radio political education programmes encouraged Imo youths in participating in the 2015 general election. Given, the fact, that exposure to radio political education programmes influenced their participation in the 2015 general elections. Results showed that relatives, party membership and loyalties, candidates' charisma, popularity/fame, religion and zoning where other factors that influenced Imo State youths' participation in the political processes.

In the same vein, Okon (2013) appraised voter education by the Nigeria broadcast media. Findings showed that broadcast stations did not significantly dedicate their programmes to effectively enlighten and inform the citizens on the need to participate in voter registration exercise as well as exercise their franchise by coming out to cast their vote in an election. The study further revealed that most content of the broadcast stations did not create a platform for discourse analysis as powered by issues driven politics. In relations to this, Abdulai et al. (2020) concluded that radio plays a very pivotal role in setting the agenda for the youths before, during, and after elections in Ghana. They believed that radio was used to disseminate messages of peace, tolerance and peaceful electoral process among different strata in the

country. According to them, because of the functions played by the media in Ghana, the last election was not free from post – election violence.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on agenda setting theory. The agenda setting theory evolved from the research work of Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972. The researchers specially investigated the correlation between the media reports of the 1968 election campaign in Chapel Hill and the issues the members of the public discussed about the elections. The Agenda setting theory as is known today resulted from the analysis of the effects of the mass media on voters' attitudes and interests towards political parties and their candidates in the election (Oboh, 2014). In other words, the theory is founded on electoral matters and actions of the media at influencing the youths to vote along a specific line of interest.

Applying the agenda setting theory to this study would mean that the media are expected to set public agenda for the citizens in relations to voter registration exercise and the entire electoral process. To this end, radio is vested with the sole responsibility of conveying information and messages that would bring about education and enlightenment on the various stages of the electioneering process. Hence, the media is to engage in aggressive public sensitization for citizens to participate in the process of choosing their elected representatives. If the media fails in this aspect, then the ripple effect will certainly affect the outcome of youths' participation in the election as well in PVCs collection. The way mass media lay emphasis on the issue of voter education and mobilisation towards the collection of PVCs, thereby setting the agenda for the voters to participate in the electioneering registration and collection of their collection their PVCs in the 2023 general elections.

Research Methodology

In this study, descriptive survey research design was adopted to sample the view of the valid youths who volunteered vital data on the influence of Radio Nigeria “Politics Nation-Wide” programme on permanent voters' card collection (PVC) among youths of Imo State. The projected population of youths in 2023 is 1,674,509. Multi-stage sampling technique was used for this study. Questionnaire and interview schedule were used as instrument for data collection. Data obtained were analyzed using mean value.

Results

Research Question One: To what extent are Imo State youths aware of PVC collection through exposure Radio Nigeria “Politics Nationwide” programme?

Table 1: Mean responses on the extent to which Imo State youths are aware of PVC collection through exposure to Radio Nigeria “Politics Nation-wide” programme

S/N	Item statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
1	Help them do their replacement of lost or damaged cards	139	191	23	13	3.25	Agreed
2	Locate the INEC office that was specified in the slip within your local government area	127	184	43	12	3.16	Agreed
3	Voters who applies to change their voting location are required to present their slip	122	171	43	30	3.05	Agreed
4	Newly registered voters are to present the slip given to them to the officials	116	182	54	14	3.09	Agreed
5	Voters who applies to change their voting location are required present to their slip.	124	163	61	18	3.07	Agreed
6	Registered voters with temporary card is advised to the INEC office in the LGA to exchange their temporary voter's cards for a permanent voter card	124	163	61	18	3.07	Agreed
7	All eligible and valid registered can collect their PVCs from 9:0am to 3:00pm daily including Saturdays and Sundays	131	179	46	10	3.18	Agreed
	Grand total					2.54	Agreed

Research Question Two: How has exposure to Radio Nigeria “Politics Nationwide” programme influence Imo State youths' attitude towards the collection of PVC?

Table 2: Mean responses on how exposure to Radio Nigeria “Politics Nation-wide” programme influenced Imo State youths' attitude towards the collection of PVC

S/N	Item Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
1	Increased the youths' awareness level about PVC registration and collection	108	201	38	19	3.08	Agreed
2	Lead to youths' participation in PVC registration and collection	144	178	31	13	3.24	Agreed
3	Encouraged actual voting in an election	122	151	72	21	3.02	Agreed
	Grand total					3.11	Agreed

Research Question Four: What other factors influenced Imo State youth participation in the collection of PVC?

Table 3: Mean responses of other factors that influenced Imo State youth participation in the collection of PVC

S/N	Item Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
1	Social media messages on PVC	204	162	0	0	3.46	Agreed
2	Opinion leader messages on PVC	170	106	56	34	3.13	Agreed
3	Friends/relatives messages on PVC	230	136	0	0	3.63	Agreed
4	Television messages on PVC	200	121	30	15	3.38	Agreed
5	Newspaper messages on PVC	165	111	51	39	3.10	Agreed
6	GSM messages on PVC	195	171	0	0	3.53	Agreed
	Grand total					3.37	Agreed

Discussion of Findings

Imo State youth extent of awareness of PVC collection through exposure Radio Nigeria “Politics Nationwide” programme

Finding revealed that the extent to which Imo State youth are aware of PVC collection through exposure to Radio Nigeria “Politics Nation-wide” programme is to a high extent with mean score of 2.54. This indicated that majority of the respondents agreed with the statements in the items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 respectively with a grand mean score of 2.54 which is greater than criterion mean of 2.5. This confirmed that the Imo State youth level of awareness on PVC collection based on exposure to Radio Nigeria “Politics Nation-wide” programme is to a large extent. This is because they believed that radio political programmes sensitized and enlightened them about replacement of lost or damaged cards; locate the INEC office within their local government areas; change their voting location are required to present their slip; newly registered voters are to present the slip given to them to the officials; voters who applies to change their voting location are required present to their slip; registered voter with temporary voters' card are advised to the INEC office in the LGA to exchange their temporary voter's cards for a permanent voter card and All eligible and valid registered can collect their PVCs from 9:0am to 3:00pm daily including Saturdays and Sundays.

Exposure to Radio Nigeria “Politics Nationwide” programme influence Imo State youths attitude towards the collection of PVC

Finding indicated that a good number of the respondents believed that Radio Nigeria “Politics Nation-wide” programme influenced youth attitude towards the collection of PVC positively with an average mean score of 3.11. This indicated that exposure to radio political programmes influenced the high turn-out of the youths on PVC registration and collection in the state. This is because they respondents agreed that exposure to radio political programmes influenced; increased their awareness level about PVC registration and collection; made them to participate in PVC registration and collection; and encouraged their actual voting in the elections. This implies that the accessibility to radio political programmes remained a vital avenue for raising the political awareness and consciousness of the people towards their participation in an election. This finding was supported by the finding of Ochonogor et al. (2019) that exposure to radio political education programmes influenced their participation in the 2015 general election. Similarly, Okolie (2015) showed that radio political messages influenced the democratic participation of Imolites and that there is a relationship between

radio political messages and participation by Imolites in democratic process. In corroborating this, Adekoya et al. (2015) revealed that radio indeed has positive impact in mobilizing women to participate in politics and with the right contents it can indeed become a potent medium in fostering development for women in politics in Nigeria.

Other factors that influenced Imo State youth participation in the collection of PVC

Findings revealed that Social media; opinion leaders; friends/relatives; television; newspapers and GSM political messages were mostly the other factors that influenced Imo State youth participation in the collection of PVC (Average weighted mean = 3.37). The implication is that the mass media is still and will continue to be an inseparable elements of Nigeria government efforts towards the consolidation of electoral processes. It means that the various channels of communication contributed tremendously in awareness creation towards PVC collections. In tandem with this study, Ochonogor et al. (2019) revealed that influence from relatives, party membership and loyalties, candidate, charisma, popularity/fame, religion and zoning were other factors that influenced Imo State youths.

Conclusion

Radio political programmes had significantly influenced Imo State youths' attitude towards the registration and collection of the PVC, could be as a result of good perception of radio programmes. This is because majority of the youths were adequately exposed to Radio Nigeria "Politics Nation-wide" programme and this have increased their level of awareness of information about PVC collection extensively. Also, social media; opinion leaders; friends/relatives; television; newspapers and GSM political messages contributed immensely in influencing Imo State youths' participation in the PVC collection outside radio programmes. It is clear that the extent to which the youths embraced radio political awareness programmes is minimal. Given, the fact that Imo State recorded low turn-out among other states in Southeast geo-political zones during the last PVC registration and collection exercise that was conducted by INEC in Nigeria. This by implication showed that the positive influence is not adequate enough.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

1. Government and Non-governmental Agencies, INEC, politicians and media professionals should persistently use radio as tool for social change by encouraging the youths to make themselves available for registration and collection of their PVCs in future electioneering.
2. There is need for well-to-do and good spirited individuals and civil societies to sponsor radio awareness programmes on PVC registration and collection as this would help in attracting public confidence towards INEC programmes and helped in sustaining the programmes before, during and after elections.
3. Election umpire in Nigeria and Imo State in particular should adopt multi-dimension communication approach to reach out to the people as no medium is exhaustively enough to change the political apathy towards collection of permanent voters' card with the complementary role of the others.

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