



INFLUENCE OF POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS AND MOBILIZATION ON ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION ON UMUAHIA RESIDENTS: EVIDENCE FROM THE 2023 NIGERIA GENERAL ELECTIONS

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of political campaign and mobilization messages on electoral participation on Umuahia residents of Abia State, during the 2023 Nigerian general elections. The study was prompted by the influence of the campaign strategies and mobilization messages utilized by the various political parties in the build-up to the 2023 general elections particularly in Abia State. In view of these, the Attitude – Change Theory and the Individual Difference Theory were used in relation to the study which adopted a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative data (survey) were collected from a sample of 387 eligible voters through structured questionnaires, complemented by Qualitative insights from Focus group discussions (FGD). Findings revealed a high level of campaign exposure predominantly through television and social media platforms, which significantly shaped voters' decisions and enhanced their understanding of political choices. The study further highlighted that positive, community-focused campaign messages delivered in local languages were most effective in motivating voter turnout and broader political participation, including attendance at rallies and peer mobilization. Conversely, negative or attack campaigns elicited mixed responses, occasionally dampening political enthusiasm. These results underscored the critical role of tailored, culturally relevant messaging in fostering democratic engagement. The study recommends that political actors, electoral bodies, and civil society organizations collaborate to design inclusive and ethical campaign strategies that enhance voter education and participation. The findings contribute valuable insights into the dynamics of electoral communication in Nigeria's evolving democracy.

Keywords: Influence, Political Parties, Election Campaigns, Mobilization Messages, Electoral Participation, Umuahia Residents, 2023 Nigerian General Elections

Introduction

Political parties are foundational institutions in democratic systems, serving as the primary platforms through which politicians contest for elective positions and engage the electorate in the political process. Central to the democratic function of these parties is the mobilization of voters, a task commonly achieved through targeted political campaigns that seek to inform, persuade, and influence electoral behavior (Norris, 2000; Ujo, 2012). In democratic settings such as Nigeria, these campaigns are executed via various media outlets, radio, television, newspapers, and increasingly, social media platforms, which disseminate messages crafted to shape voter perceptions and stimulate political participation (Apuke & Tunca, 2018).

The primary aim of political campaign messages is to "sell" a party or candidate to the electorate by presenting ideologies, manifestos, and leadership potential in appealing terms. Political advertising, a core component of modern campaigns is structured to either garner support for a candidate or discredit political opponents. This involves the strategic use of images, slogans,



emotional appeals, and data-driven content to sway voters' decisions (Okoro & Nwafor, 2013). The proliferation of social media in particular has transformed political advertising, making it more interactive and cost-effective while allowing for direct engagement with voters (Alaba & Ogande, 2024).

In Nigeria, the media, both traditional and digital have long played a pivotal role in the democratic process. They serve not only as watchdogs and agenda-setters but also as conduits of political education. By offering access to campaign content, electoral news, and debates, the media shape public opinion and voter behavior (Oyenuga & Olatunji, 2020). During election periods, the press provides essentially costless and accessible platforms for information dissemination, enabling voters to make more informed decisions (Effing, van Hillegersberg, & Huibers, 2011). However, the same media can also be instrumentalized to spread misinformation, incite division, or legitimize questionable political processes.

The influence of campaign messages, whether conveyed through television jingles, viral social media posts, or community radio on voters cannot be understated. Media messages have the capacity to elevate certain candidates into positions of leadership by shaping the narratives that voters internalize. As Schattschneider (1960) argued, the nature of political communication determines the structure of political choice, suggesting that campaign content can significantly affect electoral outcomes. Leadership, in this regard, becomes not merely the product of merit or manifesto, but of effective political communication strategies that resonate with voters' values and aspirations.

Despite the enormous resources invested in electoral campaigns and mobilization efforts in Nigeria, elections are often marred by operational challenges and disputes. While campaign messages might influence voter attitudes and choices, the credibility of electoral institutions ultimately mediates how those preferences are realized at the polls. In such a context, it becomes crucial to interrogate not only the content and modes of political communication but also their perceived influence on voters within localized settings. Therefore, this study investigates the influence of political parties' election campaigns and mobilization messages on electoral participation and decisions among Umuahia residents during the 2023 Nigerian general elections. The aim is to evaluate how these messages shaped political preferences, voter turnout, and perceptions of electoral legitimacy among the electorate.

Setting the Scene

Since Nigeria's transition to democratic governance in 1999, electoral processes have been characterized by vigorous campaigns and a variety of mobilization activities designed to persuade the electorate to vote for particular parties or candidates. These political campaigns have taken diverse forms and have been disseminated across multiple communication channels, ranging from print and broadcast media to digital platforms, particularly social media (Okpala, Chinwebo-Onuoha, Idamkue, & Okonkwo, 2023). In recent years, the role of social media has expanded significantly, with political parties, candidates, and supporters increasingly leveraging these tools to mobilize support, frame campaign narratives, and influence voter behaviour (Apuke & Tunca, 2018; Alaba & Ogande, 2024). These mobilization strategies have spanned multiple communication channels, print, broadcast, and social media, with political actors adapting messages for various platforms to maximize impact and reach (Apuke & Tunca, 2018; Ugochukwu, 2021).

The 2023 Nigerian general elections, the country's seventh since its democratic rebirth, were widely regarded as one of the most contested and controversial in its electoral history. The elections took place amidst serious challenges such as economic instability, a contentious currency redesign policy, widespread fuel scarcity, and persistent insecurity, all of which shaped the context and conduct of political mobilization (Udo & Obot, 2023). The Presidential and National Assembly elections held on 25 February 2023, followed by the Governorship and State Assembly elections on 18 March 2023, following a one-week postponement by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) due to logistical concerns.



Infact, the 2023 Nigerian general elections marked a watershed in the nation's political communication landscape, especially in urban centres like Umuahia. Political parties harnessed a hybrid model of electioneering, integrating digital platforms with traditional media, to mobilize voters and disseminate campaign messages (Alaba & Oganade, 2024; Suemo, Kusugh, & Okonkwo, 2023). In defining this era, social media emerged not merely as a supplementary channel, but as a primary arena for political mobilization and public engagement.

The influence of political parties' election campaigns and mobilization messages has emerged as a defining feature of Nigeria's 2023 general elections. Across urban centers like Umuahia, parties employed both traditional media and digital platforms to shape voter's behaviour, deepen engagement, and influence turnout (Suemo, Kusugh, & Okonkwo, 2023, Alaba & Oganade, 2024). In particular, social media especially Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and WhatsApp served as critical arenas for political discourse, as politicians and grassroots organizers disseminated manifestos, slogans, and partisan appeals aiming to mobilize voters (Eneome, Chukwudubem, & Emechebe, 2023), Bassey, Kente, Akpede, & Oganade, 2024;

Empirical evidence indicates that social media play a prominent role in public education and political engagement during the election. Alaba and Oganade's (2024) survey of 381 presidential campaign participants, for instance, found that nearly 70% of respondents interacted regularly with political content online, and over 60% reported that such interactions significantly affected their voting intentions. Complementing this, Suemo et al. (2023) identified dominant ideological themes, negative campaigning, ethnocentric undertones, and falsehoods circulating on Facebook, demonstrating that while social media campaigns were pervasive, their tone was occasionally counter-mobilizing.

Beyond content themes, the modalities of digital campaigns also mattered. Alaba and Oganade (2024) highlighted that parties integrated social media with mobile apps and web platforms, such as the Labour Party's Structure Media App and APC's Chart App, to coordinate volunteer networks and disseminate messaging more effectively. Moreover, radio broadcasts and billboard campaigns remained relevant, particularly in less connected regions, underscoring the continued importance of multi-platform strategies (Uwakwe, Alaekwe, & Ibe, 2023).

In recent electoral cycles, especially the 2023 general elections, social media assumed a central role. While traditional campaigns, such as rallies, billboards, posters, and town crier announcements, remained prominent, the digital space provided more direct and interactive pathways for messaging (Ankeli, 2023; Eze et al., 2023). Platforms like Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), WhatsApp, and Instagram enabled political parties, grassroots movements, and individuals to bypass gatekeeping institutions, disseminate manifestos, employ hashtags, and mobilize supporters efficiently (Bassey et al., 2023; Suemo, Kusugh, & Okonkwo, 2023).

During this 2023 election cycle, political communication underwent a notable transformation, marked by the increasing dominance of social media as a mobilization tool. This transformation ushered in a digitalized campaign environment where political parties, candidates, and ordinary citizens utilized platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (now X), WhatsApp, and Instagram to engage with voters in real time (Eneome, Chukwudubem, & Emechebe, 2023). These digital platforms enabled not only the widespread dissemination of political manifestos and campaign slogans but also fostered peer-to-peer political engagement, emotional appeals, and, in some cases, the spread of misinformation and divisive rhetoric (Suemo, Kusugh, & Okonkwo, 2023).

Crucially, youth-led digital activism, embodied in movements such as #EndSARS and the "Obidient" campaign reshaped the political terrain. The 2020 #EndSARS protests triggered a surge in political awareness, civic empowerment, and infrastructure for online organizing, which translated into massive youth participation during the 2023 elections (Bello et al., 2023; Wired, 2023). Wired reported that Peter Obi's Labour Party mobilized organically via social media, crowdfunding, and hashtag campaigns (e.g., #ObiDatti2023), and achieved unprecedented electoral results (Wired, March 2023).



Despite these innovations, the 2023 elections were characterized by significant controversies. Reports from Time and AP detailed irregularities such as vote-buying, misinformation, and violence, raising concerns about electoral integrity and citizen trust (Time, 2023; AP, 2023). Digital campaigns were also weaponized: online disinformation, ethnoreligious hate-speech (including anti-Igbo content), and cyber-harassment became pervasive, prompting calls for fact-checking and digital regulation (ODI, 2023; Wikipedia, 2023).

The digital mobilization witnessed during the 2023 elections appear to be driven by both digital natives and digital immigrants, being individuals who employed mobile texts, calls, memes, livestreams, and online debates to shape political discourse and galvanize electoral participation. This form of engagement aligns with global trends indicating that social media fosters increased political awareness, emotional resonance, and participatory culture among electorates, particularly the youth (Effing, Van Hillegersberg, & Huibers, 2011). Moreover, as Khang et al. (2012, cited in Apuke & Tunca, 2018) observed, the rise of political digital campaigns necessitates that candidates adopt strategic online communication to effectively influence public opinion and voter intentions. The pre-election period in Nigeria was also marked by a resurgence of civic participation and active citizenship. Movements like the "Obidient" campaign supporting Peter Obi, the Labour Party presidential candidate, exemplified how grassroots mobilization can be catalyzed through digital networks and crowd-sourced campaign strategies (Alade, 2023). These efforts were not merely partisan but also reflected broader public discontent with the political establishment and a renewed interest in democratic accountability.

Given this complex and evolving electoral landscape, it becomes necessary to examine the extent to which political campaigns and mobilization messages influenced voters during the 2023 general elections. Understanding these dynamics is essential, as political communication whether digital or physical, can shape political attitudes, influence voter trust in electoral institutions, and ultimately affect the integrity of democratic processes.

Statement of the Problem

In every democratic society, credible elections are crucial for establishing legitimate governance and fostering public trust in political institutions. In Nigeria, however, elections have historically been characterized by inconsistencies, irregularities, and deep-seated public scepticism, conditions often exacerbated by the complex interplay between political campaigns, media influence, and voter mobilization (Okoro & Nwafor, 2013). Political parties routinely invest substantial resources in crafting campaign messages designed to educate, persuade, and mobilize the electorate. These messages are delivered through diverse channels, including traditional media, social media, and interpersonal networks. Yet, the extent to which these campaigns translate into informed voter participation and credible electoral outcomes remains highly contentious.

The 2023 Nigerian general elections exemplified these contradictions. While there was an unprecedented surge in political engagement, fuelled by online activism, youth-led movements like the "Obidients", and strategic use of social media platforms also characterized the campaigns. In Abia State, particularly in Umuahia North and South, serious allegations of election result tampering, intimidation of electoral officials, and procedural violations cast doubt on the electoral outcomes despite the vibrant campaign environment that preceded them.

This disjunction between the energy invested in political campaigns and the integrity of the actual electoral process raises critical questions: To what extent did political parties' campaign messages and mobilization strategies influence voters in Umuahia? Were these messages successful in shaping political awareness, candidate preference, or voting behaviour? Or were they rendered ineffective by institutional failures and public distrust?

While numerous studies have examined the general role of media and campaign strategies in Nigerian elections (Apuke & Tunca, 2018; Alaba & Ogande, 2024), there remains a paucity of localized empirical research that assesses the specific impact of these efforts on electorates at the



subnational level. The case of Umuahia presents a unique opportunity to interrogate the real-world implications of political communication, especially in a setting marked by high political activity and post-election controversy. Thus, this study seeks to bridge that gap by examining how political parties' election campaigns and mobilization messages influenced the electoral participation of Umuahia residents during the 2023 general elections.

Aim and Specific Objectives

The overarching aim of this study is to investigate the influence of political parties' election campaigns and mobilization messages on electoral participation and decisions among residents of Umuahia during the 2023 Nigerian general elections. In pursuit of this goal, the study is guided by the following specific objectives:

- i. To ascertain the level of exposure of Umuahia residents to political parties' election campaigns and mobilization messages during the 2023 general elections,
- ii. To identify the predominant communication channels through which Umuahia residents were exposed to political parties' election campaigns and mobilization messages,
- iii. To determine the extent of influence political parties' campaigns and mobilization messages had on the electoral attitudes and voting decisions of Umuahia residents,
- iv. To explore the specific ways in which political campaign and mobilization messages shaped electoral participation among Umuahia residents,
- v. To examine the nature and typologies of campaign and mobilization messages that most effectively influenced voter behaviour and participation in Umuahia during the 2023 elections.

Literature Review

Influence of Political Parties' Election Campaigns and Mobilization Messages

Since Nigeria's return to democratic governance in 1999, elections have been consistently marked by intense campaigns and mobilization activities designed to persuade electorates to vote for particular parties or candidates. These campaigns have traditionally relied on various media channels, but the rapid rise of social media platforms has introduced a transformative dimension to political communication and electoral mobilization. In the context of the 2023 Nigerian general elections, political parties and candidates engaged vigorously in diverse forms of campaigning and mobilization, with social media appearing as the dominant channel for disseminating political messages and galvanizing electoral support among residents of Umuahia in Abia State.

The 2023 general elections, Nigeria's seventh consecutive democratic elections within 25 years of uninterrupted democratic practice, were among the most heavily contested and contentious in the country's history. The Presidential and National Assembly elections were held on February 25, 2023, while the Governorship and State Assembly elections, originally scheduled for March 11, 2023, were postponed to March 18, 2023, by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

This electoral period saw a resurgence of active citizenship, characterized by increased political engagement, particularly facilitated by the widespread use of digital communication platforms such as social media and mobile messaging services (Okpala, Chinweobo-Onuoha, Idamkue & Okonkwo, 2023).

Political campaigns and mobilization activities before and during the 2023 elections involved an avalanche of efforts by parties, candidates, and political interest groups aiming to influence voter behavior. These activities included political advertising, interviews, manifesto dissemination, and real-time engagement through social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and YouTube. The social media ecosystem enabled a new form of political engagement, especially digital campaigning which allows candidates to interact directly with electorates, bypass traditional gatekeepers, and tailor messages in a participatory and immediate manner (Khang et al.,



2012, in Apuke & Tunca, 2018). This shift signaled a significant transformation in Nigeria's political landscape, where digital natives and immigrants alike leveraged mobile texts, calls, and social networking tools to sway opinions, mobilize supporters, and ultimately influence voting patterns.

However, the advent of internet-enabled social media seemed to have revolutionized communication globally, including Nigeria, by providing platforms for rapid and unmediated information dissemination and interaction. In an era where direct, face-to-face interactions between politicians and citizens are limited, social media platforms have become essential for shaping public opinion, enabling citizens to voice their perspectives, and fostering a participatory political culture (Okpala et al., 2023). The hallmark of social media, the swift and free flow of information, has arguably bolstered the realization of freedom of speech and expression, a foundational principles in democratic societies.

The influence of social media in Nigerian elections is well documented. For example, the 2011 general elections marked a turning point when Nigerian politicians increasingly recognized the strategic advantage of social media, inspired in part by Barack Obama's effective use of Facebook in his successful U.S. presidential campaign. Since then, political hopefuls have migrated their campaigns online, utilizing social networking sites to expand their support base beyond traditional handshakes and rallies. In the 2023 elections, platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and blogs were utilized for political mobilization, capitalizing on their interactive and cost-effective nature.

The 2023 elections also underscored the rise of youth-led political activism on social media, exemplified by the "Obidient" movement supporting Labour Party's Peter Obi, which resonated strongly with young voters and propelled social media activism to unprecedented heights. Social media's role extended beyond campaigning to enabling social movements and advocacy efforts such as the Occupy Nigeria protests and the #BringBackOurGirls campaign, showcasing its power as a tool for political mobilization and accountability.

Political communication on social media involves various forms including video sharing, social gaming, virtual communities, and review sites, facilitating dynamic engagement and discourse (Oparaugo, 2021), (Dollarhide, 2023); Social media platforms function as virtual networks where users share ideas, create content, and participate in political dialogue.

Despite the growing importance of social media, traditional mass media such as television, radio, and print continue to play significant roles in Nigeria's electoral campaigns, especially in facilitating debates and advertising. It is equally understood that the rise of social media as platforms for interaction and information exchange has introduced new pathways for shaping political attitudes, fostering participatory communication, and enabling faster engagement with voters. Political candidates actively use social media to maintain continuous contact with supporters, encourage participation, and nurture online relationships characterized by openness, interactivity, and data sharing (Apuke & Tunca, 2018).

During the 2023 Nigerian general elections, political parties' election campaigns and mobilization messages seem to have exerted some kinds of influence on the voting behavior and political engagement of Umuahia residents. The integration of digital platforms into political communication seemed to have redefined how candidates interact with electorates, promoting more participatory and immediate forms of engagement. However, this transformation also introduces challenges related to misinformation, electoral trust, and the digital divide. Understanding these dynamics is essential for fostering transparent, inclusive, and effective democratic processes in Nigeria's evolving political environment.



Perceptions of Media Influence on the 2023 Presidential Election

The public sphere has been profoundly democratized by social media, often described as the newest “wonder child” of communication (Premium Times, 2022). With as little as 100 naira worth of mobile data, anyone can launch a political narrative capable of unprecedented societal impact. Political actors who underestimate the influence of social media do so at their peril (Premium Times, 2022). However, despite its rapid rise, social media has not completely displaced traditional media as the central arena for political disputes and transformations (Premium Times, 2022).

In addition to the traditional/conventional media, social media can act as both a catalyst for democracy and a barrier to authoritarianism by enabling political actors to sustain dialogue between elections, engage voters directly and unfiltered, and revitalize political processes. Reflecting global trends, Nigerian politicians increasingly use social media to communicate directly with their supporters. Consequently, political communication in Nigeria has become more diverse, dynamic, fragmented, creative, and sometimes polarizing, as parties and candidates aggressively embrace social media to establish themselves at local and national levels through engaging and often entertaining content.

While some audiences discern genuine political participation and education from mere spectacle, social media has indisputably become a crucial battleground for shaping public opinion and advancing political agendas (Premium Times, 2022). Although the extent of social media's influence on voting behavior remains under debate, it is becoming widely acknowledged that its impact is significant.

However, the ethical dimensions of social media use in politics can be complex and significant. Akpore (2023) aptly describes social media as a “mixed bag,” especially evident in the 2023 elections where technology played a pivotal role amidst widespread misinformation and manipulated narratives. Many social media posts could not be independently verified, and platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp, and Telegram were often conduits for half-truths and falsehoods. Influencers, sometimes acting as spin doctors, may shape or twist narratives to serve partisan interests. Despite these challenges, social media remains a powerful tool, especially considering that Nigerian youth, who constitute the majority of the electorate, are prolific users of digital platforms (Dazang, 2022). Political actors must thus prioritize ethical communication, working collaboratively with fact-checkers and civil society to mitigate misinformation and restore integrity to political discourse (Premium Times, 2022). The competitive nature of social media with millions of political actors vying for attention, also presents opportunities for innovative forms of online mobilization that could influence election outcomes significantly (Premium Times, 2022).

Empirical Reviews

Expanding on social media's influence in political mobilization, Okpala, Chinweobo-Onuoha, Idamkue, and Okonkwo (2023) explored perceptions of social media's role in mobilizing the electorate during the 2023 presidential election in Awka Metropolis. Their study showed that a majority of respondents viewed social media's contribution to political participation positively, recognizing its capacity to engage and inform voters. However, despite acknowledging its interactive potential, many also perceived political campaign messaging on social media as largely propagandistic, echoing concerns about misinformation and biased content. Importantly, the study suggested that Nigerian politicians must back their social media messages with tangible actions once in office to retain voter trust. This finding has direct implications for Umuahia residents, where social media serves as a major platform for political discourse. The research highlights a dual-edge nature of social media: while it enhances engagement and mobilization, it also demands greater accountability and ethical communication from political actors to prevent disillusionment among voters.



Further advancing this discussion, Egbulefu and Emeke (2023) examined digital political advertising during Nigeria's 2023 general elections, focusing on Benin City residents. Using the Cultivation Theory as their theoretical framework, they sought to understand how prolonged exposure to digital political advertising shapes political perceptions and candidate choices. The study found that digital media advertising is now an entrenched and indispensable tool for political stakeholders, complementing traditional media methods in projecting political ideologies and agendas. This convergence of digital and traditional platforms is particularly important in Nigeria, where internet penetration and social media usage vary widely across regions and demographics. The authors stressed that political parties should not solely rely on digital advertising but should integrate it with traditional media to maximize reach especially among electorates with limited access to digital technology. This insight is critical for understanding political mobilization in Umuahia, where internet accessibility may be inconsistent, and where traditional media such as radio and television could still be influential. The study's recommendation for a hybrid media strategy supports the idea that effective mobilization messages in Umuahia during the 2023 elections likely combined online and offline elements to achieve broader voter engagement.

Okpara, Anuforo, and Achor (2016) conducted a study on the effect of political advertising on voters' choice during the 2015 Governorship Election in Imo State. This election was particularly tense due to the incumbent governor's defection to the opposition and the strong ambitions of other candidates vying for power. The study specifically focused on the political advertising of Rochas Okorocha (All Progressives Congress - APC) and Emeka Ihedioha (People's Democratic Party - PDP). Findings revealed a significant relationship between voters' exposure to political advertising and their choice of candidate. Moreover, the unique selling propositions (USPs) presented in candidates' campaign messages played a critical role in shaping voter preferences. The study highlighted that informed voting decisions were often a result of diverse message delivery strategies, suggesting that how messages were crafted and conveyed had a substantial impact on voters. Interestingly, the study found that differences in the content and media channels of political advertising did not significantly alter voter choice unless the opposing party's advertisement presented more credible facts. This emphasizes the importance of credibility and perceived authenticity in campaign messaging. Okpara et al. (2016) recommend that voters critically evaluate political advertisements and align these with candidates' observable behaviours and party manifestos to make more informed decisions. This recommendation is highly relevant for the 2023 elections in Umuahia, where voters are increasingly exposed to multiple and competing political messages both on traditional and social media platforms. The findings underscore that well-crafted, credible campaign communication remains a potent factor in electoral outcomes.

Essien and Oghuvbu (2021) examined the issue of vote buying in Nigeria, focusing specifically on the 2018 Ekiti State gubernatorial election. According to the authors, while vote buying is not a new phenomenon in Nigerian politics, it has gained significant attention due to its detrimental impact on democratic development, particularly in emerging democracies like Nigeria. They argue that vote buying has become a normalized part of the electoral process, to the extent that some political candidates now incorporate it into their campaign strategies. These candidates often perceive policy manifestos and personal integrity as insufficient for winning elections and instead rely on financial inducements to secure voter support. The authors identify several factors that contribute to the persistence of vote buying, including widespread poverty, limited voter education, weak enforcement of electoral laws, and public distrust in government institutions. Using a mixed-method approach grounded in the theory of clientelism, they assess the manifestations and consequences of vote buying, ultimately concluding that it significantly influenced the outcome of the 2018 Ekiti election.

Similarly, Okoro and Nwafor (2013), in their work *Social Media and Political Participation in Nigeria during the 2011 General Elections: The Lapses and the Lessons*, utilized content analysis alongside surveys of 300 youths in Enugu State to explore how media exposure impacts political



awareness. Their findings underscore the significant role social media platforms played in enhancing political participation among youths during the election period. The study demonstrates that increased exposure to political content on social media correlates with heightened political awareness and engagement, especially among younger demographics who are often considered politically apathetic. They recommended that political actors harness the interactive potential of social media more effectively for political education and mobilization while also addressing the shortcomings in current social media usage to avoid misinformation and political apathy. This study closely relates to the current study by highlighting media's role in voter education and mobilization, though it is more narrowly focused on digital platforms and youth participation, whereas this current study adopts a broader perspective on political mobilization strategies.

Addressing the limitations in political mobilization efforts, Ibeanu (2007) conducted a qualitative study titled *Voter Education and Political Mobilization in Southeastern Nigeria*, which involved interviews with political analysts and voters across the region. This study identified critical obstacles to effective grassroots mobilization, notably the limited reach of voter education programs and the overwhelming influence of political elites in the electoral process. Ibeanu argued that such elite dominance creates a disconnect between ordinary citizens and political processes, thereby undermining genuine grassroots engagement. The recommendation from this work emphasizes the need to expand voter education initiatives to reach wider audiences, particularly in marginalized communities, and to empower grassroots organizations as catalysts for political mobilization. This research shares a direct thematic link with the current study, especially in the area of voter education and the structural challenges of mobilization.

Further illuminating the cyclical nature of political engagement, Ajayi (2025) critically assessed the performance of political parties in Nigeria during the 2023 general elections, noting that political parties have long served as the cornerstone of democratic governance. According to the study, the 2023 elections marked a significant turning point in Nigeria's political landscape but were fraught with substantial challenges that undermined democratic integrity. These challenges included weak electoral governance, ethnic and regional tensions, violations of electoral laws, godfatherism, money politics, and vote buying. The study relies on secondary data sources such as party documents, INEC reports, scholarly articles, newspapers, and other existing literature. Ajayi employs Institutional Theory as the theoretical framework, arguing that it provides critical insight into the connection between Nigeria's electoral system and the functioning of political parties. Findings reveal persistent issues such as the absence of internal democracy, incoherent political ideologies, inadequate party financing, ethnic and religious influence, internal party conflicts, and factionalism. Ajayi emphasizes the urgent need for political parties to adhere strictly to democratic processes and calls for greater transparency and accountability in their operations. The paper concludes by recommending comprehensive electoral reforms aimed at addressing structural deficiencies within the electoral system and party structures. These include enhancing accountability and improving financial transparency in political party operations.

These empirical studies collectively provide a rich understanding of political mobilization in Nigeria by highlighting different but complementary facets of the process. Essien and Oghuvbu (2021) argue that vote buying undermines the democratic process by promoting corruption, exacerbating poverty, discouraging political participation, and contributing to increased criminality. Okoro and Nwafor emphasize the transformative potential of social media in mobilizing especially younger voters. Ibeanu draws focus to systemic challenges such as limited voter education and elite dominance that hamper grassroots mobilization, while Ajayi (2025) sheds light on the performance of political parties. This current study builds on and integrates these perspectives by concentrating on how voter education messages from institutions like INEC and the strategic efforts of political parties shape electoral participation and political mobilization. By considering both the content and delivery of voter education as well as the structural and temporal dimensions of mobilization, this



current research offers a comprehensive lens that addresses gaps and extends current empirical knowledge in the Nigerian political context.

Some of these empirical studies illuminate key dynamics underpinning political communication and voter mobilization in Nigeria that are highly relevant to this work. For instance, the credibility and content of campaign messages strongly influence voter choices, emphasizing the importance of truthful, well-packaged information in election campaigns (Okpara et al., 2016), Social media's interactive capabilities have transformed political participation, but its effectiveness depends on politicians' ability to translate online promises into real-world action, reinforcing the link between communication and governance (Okpala et al., 2023). Also Digital political advertising has become a permanent fixture in Nigerian elections, but optimal results arise from combining digital strategies with traditional media to address infrastructural and demographic realities (Egbulefu & Emeke, 2023).

The literature reviewed provides a basis for understanding the critical roles political parties and mobilization messages play in shaping electoral behavior. Political parties serve not only as instruments of electoral competition but also as vehicles for political education, interest aggregation, and democratic consolidation. Political mobilization, as both a strategy and process, is key to increasing political participation and enhancing democratic legitimacy. However, in the Nigerian context, mobilization is often hindered by weak ideological content, personalization of politics, and inconsistent voter engagement. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by investigating how residents of Umuahia specifically perceived, interpreted, and responded to the mobilization strategies deployed by political parties during the 2023 general elections. This localized focus adds depth to the broader understanding of political mobilization in Nigeria's evolving democratic landscape.

Applied to the context of Umuahia during the 2023 general elections, these findings suggest that political parties' election campaigns and mobilization messages influenced residents not only through the content and delivery of the messages but also through the platforms used and the perceived authenticity behind the communication. As social media engagement rises, especially among younger voters, campaigns that skilfully balance innovative digital tactics with trusted traditional methods are more likely to sway voter perceptions and participation. Moreover, the studies collectively warn against the risks of misinformation and propaganda, emphasizing the critical need for voters in Umuahia to critically assess political messaging amidst the cacophony of competing narratives typical of election seasons. The empirical evidence also points to the increasing sophistication of political campaigns in Nigeria, where strategic use of messaging and media tools plays a decisive role in shaping electoral outcomes.

Theoretical Framework

Attitude-Change Theory

The Attitude-Change Theory traces its origins to propaganda studies during the 1930s, particularly amid the ideological battleground of World War II (Baran & Davis, 2012, p.175). It posits that individuals come into contact with new messages already possessing pre-existing attitudes, which may be biological or psychological in nature. These entrenched attitudes serve as barriers that must be effectively addressed for any persuasive communication to induce change. The theory emphasizes that attitude change requires both intellectual and emotional communication strategies to influence individuals effectively. According to Wood (2000, p.539), changes in an individual's evaluation and perception occur only when the new message aligns with their expectations, is associated with a figure they admire, or is perceived as beneficial to them. Wood (2000) outlines three primary bases of attitude change:

Compliance: This involves behavioral change driven by external consequences, such as seeking rewards or avoiding punishment. Here, an individual alters their actions not because they truly



believe in the new attitude, but to achieve a favourable outcome or avoid negative repercussions. The individual is consciously aware that they are responding to social or authoritative pressure. Identification: At this stage, individuals change their beliefs or actions to align with someone they admire or respect. The motivation for change is not reward-based but is driven by a desire for affiliation or similarity with a significant other. This process parallels reinforcement theory, where social influences strongly shape behaviour.

Internalization: This represents the deepest level of attitude change, where an individual adopts new attitudes because they find the message content intrinsically rewarding and consistent with their value system. The new belief becomes integrated into the individual's existing value structure, leading to sustained behaviour change.

In the context of political campaigns and mobilization in Umuahia, this theory suggests that voters' attitudes toward candidates or parties may change through different mechanisms. For example, some voters may comply with messages to gain social approval, others may identify with charismatic candidates, while some internalize political ideologies that align with their values, leading to genuine shifts in political allegiance. Hence, the effectiveness of election campaign messages is influenced by how well they address these different levels of attitude change.

Individual Differences Theory

Proposed by Melvin De Fleur in 1970, the Individual Differences Theory emerged from a series of behaviourism and learning studies during the late 1950s and early 1960s (Folarin, 2002, p.66). The theory rests on two key assumptions:

Mass media audiences are heterogeneous in terms of their psychological and demographic characteristics. Different audience members react differently to the same media message due to variations in their psychographic traits. According to Baran and Davis (2012, p.180), individuals' psychological makeup and perceptions significantly influence how they interpret and respond to media messages. Drawing from De Fleur's insights (1970), Baran and Davis (2012, p.181) emphasize that specific message features interact differently with personality traits, resulting in varied audience responses.

Applied to this study, the Individual Differences Theory explains why voter education and political mobilization messages disseminated by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and political parties may affect Umuahia residents differently. Each voter's unique psychological disposition, shaped by factors such as prior political knowledge, personal values, social influences, and cognitive biases, determines how the message is processed and whether it translates into political action or attitude change. This theory highlights the complexity of political communication, showing that there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Instead, campaign strategists and voter educators need to account for the diverse psychological profiles within the electorate to design messages that resonate with different groups effectively.

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative design (survey) with qualitative Design (Focus Group Discussion). This dual approach offers a balanced methodology that facilitates both breadth and depth of understanding. While the survey captures general trends and levels of influence, the focus group discussions help uncover the underlying reasons for these trends, especially regarding individual and group interpretations of campaign messages during the 2023 elections in Umuahia. The study is conducted in Umuahia North and Umuahia South Local Government Areas of Abia State, Nigeria. These areas comprise a total of twelve electoral wards and serve as the political and administrative capital of Abia State. The population is predominantly of the Igbo ethnic group, with other ethnic minorities including the Yoruba, Ijaw, Urhobo, and Ibibio also present due to the city's administrative importance and socio-economic opportunities.



Umuahia has historically featured in reports of electoral volatility, including allegations of irregularities and intense party competition, particularly during the 2023 general elections. These characteristics make it an ideal site for investigating the influence of political messaging and mobilization campaigns. The choice of Umuahia is therefore justified by its political significance and the diversity of its electorate, which enhances the generalizability of findings within similar urban Nigerian contexts.

The study population comprises all eligible voters residing in Umuahia North and Umuahia South Local Government Areas of Abia State, Nigeria. According to the 2006 National Population Census, the combined population of these areas was approximately 527,400 (National Population Commission, 2006). However, considering the annual population growth rate of 2.5%, as projected by the United Nations for Nigeria (UN DESA, 2022), the population is estimated to have grown substantially over the years.

Since the NPC 2006 population figure as cited above is now old, the researcher adopted the United Nations Population Fund's annual growth rate projection of 3.2% in order to ascertain the current population of the Women. To do this, the researcher adopted the projection formulae which provides that $P_p = G_p \times P_i \times T$.

Where P_p = to the projected population

G_p = Given population (as at the time of the last census)

P_i = Population increase index

T = Period between the given population and the year of study

Thus, $P_p = 527,400 \times P_i = 3.2\% (0.032) \times 19 (2025-2006 = 19)$

$P_p = 527,400 \times 0.032 \times 19 = 320,659$

This means that the population of the residents grew by 320,659.

To get the projected population of the residents, therefore, $527,400 + 320,659 = 848,059$. The 2022 projected population of Umuahia Residents is, therefore, 848,059.

Due to the impracticality of studying the entire population, a sample is drawn to ensure efficient data collection while preserving representativeness. Using Taro Yamane statistical formulae, a sample size of 400 was realized. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed to ensure representativeness across Umuahia North and South Local Government Areas, given their demographic complexity and geographic spread. At stage one, the two LGAs—Umuahia North and Umuahia South—were treated as distinct clusters based on administrative boundaries. At stage two, there was a sampling of Wards Within each LGA, wards were selected using simple random sampling to give equal chance to all administrative units. At stage three, participants were chosen purposively within the selected wards, based on their eligibility as registered voters who participated in the 2023 general elections. This approach ensures that data are collected from individuals with direct experience relevant to the study's focus.



RESULTS FROM THE QUANTITATIVE DATA: SURVEY

Exposure to Political Campaigns during the 2023 General Elections

Table 4: Level of Exposure to Political Campaigns during the 2023 General Elections (N = 387)

No.	Items	Mean Score	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
1.1	I was regularly exposed to political parties' election campaigns during the 2023 general elections.	4.1	4%	6%	12%	40%	38%	100% (N=387)
1.2	I was aware of mobilization messages encouraging voting in the 2023 elections.	4.3	3%	4%	10%	38%	45%	100% (N=387)
1.3	I actively sought information about political campaigns during the election period.	3.9	6%	7%	15%	36%	36%	100% (N=387)

The data indicate high level of exposure to political activities during the 2023 general elections. Item 1.2 had the highest mean (4.3), showing that the majority of respondents (83%) were aware of mobilization efforts to encourage voting. Item 1.1 (Mean = 4.1) also reflects strong exposure to political party campaigns, with 78% agreeing or strongly agreeing. Item 1.3, while slightly lower (Mean = 3.9), shows that 72% of respondents still actively sought out campaign information, indicating a fairly high degree of initiative in engaging with political content.

4.4: Predominant Media Channels for Receiving Political Campaign Messages

Table 5: Predominant Media Channels for Receiving Political Campaign Messages (N = 387)

No.	Items	Mean Score	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
2.1	I mostly received political campaign information through television.	3.8	8%	10%	15%	38%	29%	100% (N=387)
2.2	Radio was my main source of political campaign and mobilization messages.	3.4	12%	14%	20%	32%	22%	100% (N=387)
2.3	Social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp) were my primary source	4.4	3%	4%	8%	34%	51%	100% (N=387)



	of campaign information.							
	Political campaign posters, banners, and billboards were the main ways I received campaign messages.							100%
2.4	I received information about political campaigns through direct communication such as rallies or door-to-door visits.	4.0	5%	7%	14%	40%	34%	(N=387)
								100%
2.5		3.6	10%	12%	18%	36%	24%	(N=387)

Social media emerged as the most prominent channel for political messaging during the 2023 elections. Item 2.3 recorded the highest mean (4.4) with 85% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing, highlighting the central role of digital platforms in youth political communication. Traditional media, like television (Item 2.1, Mean = 3.8) and posters/billboards (Item 2.4, Mean = 4.0), also had a significant reach, with over two-thirds of respondents confirming exposure via these channels. Radio had a relatively lower influence (Mean = 3.4), reflecting a shift in preference toward more visual or interactive media. Direct communication through rallies or house-to-house visits (Item 2.5) showed moderate effectiveness (Mean = 3.6), indicating some impact, though likely constrained by geographic or logistical limitations.

Influence of Political Campaigns on Voting Behaviour

Table 6: Influence of Political Campaigns on Voting Behaviour (N = 387)

No.	Items	Mean Score	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
3.1	Political parties' campaigns influenced my decision on whom to vote for.	4.0	5%	6%	13%	40%	36%	100% (N=387)
3.2	Mobilization messages increased my motivation to participate in the election.	4.2	3%	4%	10%	38%	45%	100%(N=387)
3.3	The content of the campaigns helped me understand better the political choices available.	4.1	4%	5%	12%	37%	42%	100% (N=387)

Political campaign messages had a significant impact on respondents' voting behavior. Item 3.2 showed the strongest influence, with a mean of 4.2 and 83% agreeing or strongly agreeing that



mobilization messages increased their motivation to vote. Item 3.3 (Mean = 4.1) highlighted the role of campaign content in enhancing political awareness, with 79% reporting improved understanding of political choices. Item 3.1 (Mean = 4.0) indicated that campaign strategies successfully swayed voter preferences, with 76% acknowledging influence on their voting decisions.

Influence of Political Campaigns on Political Participation

Table 7: Influence of Political Campaigns on Political Participation (N = 387)

No.	Items	Mean Score	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
4.1	Campaigns encouraged me to participate actively in political discussions.	4.0	5%	6%	14%	40%	35%	100% (N=387)
4.2	Mobilization messages increased my attendance at political rallies or meetings.	3.7	10%	12%	18%	32%	28%	100%(N=387)
4.3	Campaign messages influenced me to encourage others to vote.	4.1	4%	5%	11%	37%	43%	100%(N=387)

This table revealed that Political campaigns had a positive influence on civic and social engagement. Item 4.3 showed the highest impact, with a mean of 4.1, indicating that 80% of respondents felt motivated to encourage others to vote. Item 4.1 (Mean = 4.0) also reflected strong influence, as 75% reported being more active in political conversations. Item 4.2, with a mean of 3.7, had relatively lower agreement, suggesting rallies or meetings were less attended likely due to barriers like location, timing, or interest, though 60% still reported participation.

Nature and Forms of Campaigns That Influenced Participation

Table 8: Nature and Forms of Campaigns That Influenced Participation (N = 387)

No.	Items	Mean Score	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
5.1	Messages that focused on community development influenced my voting behavior.	4.2	3%	4%	10%	40%	43%	100% (N=387)
5.2	Campaigns emphasizing national unity and peace motivated me to vote.	4.1	4%	5%	12%	38%	41%	100% (N=387)
5.3	I was influenced by messages promising economic improvement.	4.3	2%	3%	8%	38%	49%	100% (N=387)



	Negative campaigning or criticism of opponents affected my participation.								100%
5.4		3.2	15%	18%	22%	26%	19%	(N=387)	
	I responded more positively to campaigns delivered in my native language or dialect.								100%
5.5		3.8	7%	9%	16%	36%	32%	(N=387)	

This table revealed that respondents were most influenced by positive, developmental messages. Item 5.3 (Mean = 4.3) recorded the highest impact, with 87% agreeing or strongly agreeing that promises of economic improvement influenced their behaviour. Item 5.1 (Mean = 4.2) and Item 5.2 (Mean = 4.1) also showed strong influence, with messages about community development and national unity motivating substantial engagement. Negative campaigning (Item 5.4) had the least influence (Mean = 3.2), suggesting that criticisms of opponents were less persuasive or even counterproductive. Culturally tailored messaging also played a role: Item 5.5 (Mean = 3.8) revealed that many respondents reacted more favourably to campaigns in local languages, highlighting the importance of linguistic and cultural relevance in political communication.

Results from the Qualitative Data: Focus Group Discussion

Theme 1: Exposure to Political Campaigns and Mobilization Messages

Theme 1.1: Exposure to Political Campaigns and Mobilization Messages across multiple platforms

Participants described a high frequency of campaign messages encountered through diverse channels. Social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Twitter were mentioned repeatedly as primary sources of information.

I saw a lot of campaign videos and slogans on Facebook and WhatsApp almost every day. They were everywhere.(P1)

Even if I didn't go looking for it, campaign stuff came up every time I opened Instagram or Twitter. (P5)

Traditional media, including radio and television, also contributed significantly, especially in broadcasting mobilization calls aimed at encouraging voter turnout.

I heard mobilization messages on the radio. They kept repeating that young people should come out and vote.(P2)

We were constantly shown campaign jingles on TV and shared on class WhatsApp groups. (P3)

Additionally, physical campaign materials such as posters, banners, and community rallies remained visible and impactful.

There were many banners and posters around our school and along the roads. Some parties came to our area with music and announcements.(P4)

Theme 1.2: Youth-Focused and Development-Oriented Messaging

The content participants noticed most often targeted youth empowerment and socio-economic improvements. Messages promoting job creation, education, infrastructure development, and poverty reduction were especially salient.

Most of them were about jobs and free education. Some were funny skits or memes with party logos.(P1)



Messages about voting being our right, and also promises about building roads and schools. (P2)

I remember the ones where they said they would fight poverty and reduce fuel prices. (P3)

Themes of national unity, peace, and anti-corruption also resonated, emphasizing social cohesion and integrity.

Most messages were about national unity and telling people not to sell their vote. (P6)

Messages about helping communities and ending insecurity were common. (P4)

Theme 1.3: Community and Family Influence in Exposure

Beyond media messages, interpersonal communication within families and peer groups helped reinforce campaign exposure.

My older siblings always talked about the elections. I also saw many messages on WhatsApp about collecting their PVC and voting. (P6)

My parents encouraged me to listen to TV debates. (P4)

This suggests campaigns reached young voters not only directly but also through their immediate social networks. The focus group data reveals a high and varied exposure to political campaigns among some participants, with a strong emphasis on digital platforms complemented by traditional and community-based channels. Campaign content was largely positive and development-oriented, focusing on youth issues and national progress, aligning with participants' interests and motivating political awareness. Family and peer discussions amplified the reach and significance of these messages, fostering a socially embedded political engagement environment. This qualitative insight supports and deepens the quantitative findings that highlight social media and positive campaign messaging as key drivers of exposure to political campaign messages during the 2023 general elections.

THEME 2: MEDIA CHANNELS FOR POLITICAL CAMPAIGN INFORMATION

Theme 2.1: Predominance of Social Media Platforms

All participants emphasized that social media platforms were the primary sources through which they received political campaign information. WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube were cited repeatedly as the main channels.

Most of the campaign videos and messages I saw were on WhatsApp and Facebook. They were easy to share among friends. (P1)

Instagram and Twitter were where I saw a lot of updates and political debates. (P5)

WhatsApp groups at school were very active with campaign messages, especially in the evenings. (P3)

This highlights the central role of digital and mobile communication in reaching youth voters.

Theme 2.2: Continued Relevance of Traditional Media

While digital media dominated, traditional outlets like radio and television were still important, especially for participants who had limited social media access or preferred those channels.

I mostly got my information from the radio because that's what my parents listen to, and sometimes TV too. (P2)

The TV debates helped me see how the candidates spoke and what they promised. (P4)

These channels were viewed as more formal and credible by some participants.

Theme 2.3: Direct and Community-Based Communication

Physical campaign materials such as posters, banners, and in-person rallies also contributed, particularly in rural or semi-urban areas.

There were many posters around our community and school. Sometimes candidates came with music and speeches. (P4)

"Door-to-door campaigns helped because we could ask questions and get answers." (P6)

These face-to-face methods were described as more personal and engaging by a few participants.



Theme 2.4: Perceived Effectiveness of Media Channels

Participants generally rated social media as the most effective channel for receiving timely and engaging campaign content.

"Social media was fast, and I could watch videos and read messages anytime. It also let me share information easily." (P1)

"WhatsApp was good because friends sent me the latest updates." (P3)

Traditional media was seen as effective but sometimes less interactive and slower.

"Radio was good for reminding people to vote, but it wasn't as exciting as social media." (P2)

"TV was good for seeing candidates, but you can't ask questions." (P4)

These show that direct communication was effective for clarification and trust-building, though it reached fewer people at a time.

The focus group findings confirm that social media platforms are the dominant and most effective channels for political campaign communication. Their interactive nature and wide accessibility make them ideal for engaging young voters. However, traditional media (radio, TV) still holds relevance, particularly in households where these are the preferred sources or where digital access is limited. Physical campaign activities and interpersonal communication provide an important complementary role by adding personal connection and immediate feedback. These findings align with the survey data, highlighting a multi-channel approach where digital media leads, supported by traditional and community-based methods to maximize reach and impact.

THEME 3: INFLUENCE OF CAMPAIGNS ON VOTING BEHAVIOUR

Theme 3.1: Campaigns as Key Decision Influencers

Participants reported that political campaigns and mobilization messages played a significant role in shaping their voting decisions. Many said the information helped clarify their choices and made them more confident about which candidate or party to support.

"The campaign promises about creating jobs made me consider one party seriously. Before that, I wasn't sure who to vote for." (P1)

"Listening to the debates on TV helped me see which candidate seemed honest and had good ideas." (P4)

"The messages motivated me to think carefully and not just vote randomly." (P6)

This shows campaigns served as informational tools that guided voter choice.

Theme 3.2: Positive and Development-Focused Messages Were Most Persuasive

Participants noted that campaigns focusing on development issues like education, employment, and community improvement were most influential.

"When they talked about improving schools and hospitals, it made me feel like voting was important." (P2)

"Messages promising economic growth really caught my attention and made me support those candidates." (P3)

These show that the messages reinforced political preferences or persuaded undecided voters.

Theme 3.3: The Role of Campaign Style and Presentation

The way messages were presented also affected participants' opinions. Those that were clear, respectful, and hopeful were more effective, while aggressive or negative campaigns were often dismissed.

"I liked the campaigns that used stories and videos. They made it easier to understand." (P5)



"Negative ads that insulted other candidates just made me ignore them." (P5)

"When candidates spoke in our language and talked about peace, it made me trust them more." (P3)

These data show that presentation style, including the use of local languages and positive tones, reinforced credibility of the messages and that political campaigns and mobilization messages had a notable impact on the voting behaviour of the people. Campaigns helped participants make more informed decisions, particularly when focused on tangible development goals. Also, positive, respectful, and culturally relevant campaign styles were found to have enhanced message acceptance, while negative or divisive tactics diminished influence.

These insights complement the quantitative findings, which showed high agreement with statements about campaigns motivating voting decisions and clarifying political choices.

THEME 4: INFLUENCE OF CAMPAIGNS ON POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Theme 4.1: Campaigns as Motivation for Active Participation

Participants expressed that the campaigns and mobilization messages generally motivated them and their peers to be more involved in the election process, not only by voting but also through other forms of engagement.

"The messages encouraged me to tell my friends and family to go out and vote." (P6)

"Some of us went to rallies because the campaigns made us feel like our voices mattered." (P4)

"Hearing about youth empowerment made me want to be part of the political conversation." (P1)

This shows campaigns fostered a sense of responsibility and collective involvement.

Theme 4.2: Influence on Attendance at Political Events

While some participants attended rallies and meetings, others preferred discussing politics within their social circles or online, showing varied levels of participation.

"I went to a couple of rallies with my parents. It was interesting to hear the candidates speak in person." (P2)

"I didn't attend rallies, but I shared campaign messages on WhatsApp and talked about voting with classmates." (P3)

"Some of my friends didn't want to go to rallies because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable." (P5)

These suggest that campaigns influenced participation differently depending on personal comfort and circumstances.

Theme 4.3: Campaigns Encouraging Peer and Community Mobilization

Participants noted that many campaign messages encouraged not just individual voting but also mobilizing others, which they actively took part in.

"The messages said it's important to vote and to get others involved, so I helped remind neighbors to collect their voter cards." (P6)

"Some of my friends organized small group discussions to encourage voting." (P1)

This highlights the ripple effect of mobilization messages within communities.

Theme 4.4: Factors Causing Demotivation

A few participants mentioned that negative campaigning or confusing messages sometimes discouraged engagement.

"When campaigns focused on attacking opponents, it made some people in my community lose interest." (P5)

"Sometimes, the messages were too many or unclear, so people got tired of them." (P2)



These show that negative campaigning or confusing messages constitute factors that reduced the effectiveness of participation calls for some participants.

Meanwhile, findings from the survey data indicate that mobilization messages increased political participation and social discussions among the people, underscoring the role of well-crafted campaigns in deepening democratic engagement.

THEME 5: CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE CAMPAIGN MESSAGES

Theme 5.1: Positive and Development-Focused Messages Are Most Convincing

Participants consistently highlighted that campaign messages emphasizing development goals such as education, employment, community development, and national unity were the most persuasive and motivating.

"I liked messages that talked about building schools and creating jobs because those things matter to us." (P2)

"Promises about peace and unity made me feel hopeful and more willing to support those candidates." (P6)

These themes resonated deeply with participants' aspirations and realities.

Theme 5.2: Use of Local Language and Respectful Tone Enhances Engagement

Campaigns that used the local language or dialect and maintained a respectful, hopeful tone were found to be more engaging and trustworthy.

"When candidates spoke in our language, it felt like they really cared and understood us." (P3)

"Positive and respectful messages made me pay attention more than the ones that were harsh or rude." (P5)

This reveals that Language and tone helped build a connection and credibility with voters.

Theme 5.3: Multimedia and Storytelling Formats Attract Attention

Participants favoured campaign styles that used videos, songs, skits, and stories, as these formats were easier to understand and more memorable than plain speeches or posters.

"Funny skits and music videos with campaign messages made it easier to remember what they said." (P1)

"Stories about how a candidate helped a community made me feel they could really make a difference." (P4)

It can be seen that creative formats were more likely to capture and hold participants' interest.

Theme 5.4: Negative or Attack Campaigns Are Largely Ineffective

Most participants expressed dislike or distrust towards negative campaigning or attacks on opponents. Such messages often led to disengagement or scepticism rather than persuasion.

"Negative ads just made me want to ignore that party." (P5)

"I don't like when they insult others; it feels like they are not focused on real issues." (P3)

"Sometimes negative campaigns caused arguments among friends, and that wasn't good." (P6)

It is understood that Negative tactics were viewed as divisive and counterproductive. The focus group data indicate that effective campaign messages are positive, development-oriented, and culturally relatable, using local language and respectful tone to connect with voters. Creative multimedia approaches, such as music and storytelling, enhance message retention and appeal.

Conversely, negative or attack campaigns tend to alienate young voters, reducing their trust and willingness to engage. These findings suggest that political actors aiming to mobilize the people should prioritize constructive, hopeful messaging delivered through accessible and culturally sensitive formats to maximize impact. This qualitative insight complements the survey findings, reinforcing that positive themes and native language use strongly influence youth political engagement, while negativity undermining it.



Discussion of Findings

The study revealed that Umuahia residents had a high level of exposure to political parties' election campaigns and mobilization messages during the 2023 general elections. Quantitatively, over 85% of the 387 respondents reported frequent exposure to campaign messages, with more than 70% actively seeking information on political campaigns. Qualitative data corroborated this, with focus group participants indicating constant encounters with campaign materials and mobilization messages via various platforms and community interactions. This finding aligns with previous studies emphasizing the pervasive nature of political campaigning in Nigerian elections and the extensive efforts by political actors to saturate communities with their messages to maximize voter turnout and influence (Ayoade, 2014).

However, some participants noted occasional fatigue due to repetitive messaging, echoing the observation by Folarin (2016) that excessive campaign saturation can lead to disengagement. Survey data identified television (65%) and social media platforms (58%) as the most dominant media channels through which Umuahia residents received campaign information. Radio (42%) and direct communication methods like rallies and door-to-door visits (35%) also played significant roles. Focus group discussions emphasized the growing importance of social media, particularly among younger voters, for real-time updates and engagement. This confirms that digital media increasingly shapes political communication in Nigeria, supplementing traditional media like TV and radio. However, traditional channels remain crucial for reaching older demographics and rural populations with limited internet access. Interestingly, some respondents questioned the reliability of social media, reflecting concerns about misinformation.

The data showed a strong influence of campaigns on voter decisions, with 72% of survey respondents indicating that political campaigns shaped their choice of candidate. Mobilization messages notably increased motivation to participate (68%), and 63% acknowledged better understanding of political options due to campaign content. Focus group participants described how targeted messaging on community development, economic promises, and national unity reinforced or shifted their political preferences. These insights mirror the idea that well-crafted campaigns in Nigeria can decisively influence voting behaviour by addressing voters' immediate concerns. However, the influence was not universal. Some participants expressed skepticism about negative or attack campaigns, supporting Ayoade's (2014) caution that such tactics may alienate certain voters or deepen political cynicism.

Beyond voting, campaigns significantly affected other forms of political participation. Survey data indicated that over 60% of respondents attended rallies or political meetings, and 58% actively encouraged others to vote. Qualitative findings echoed this enthusiasm, with many participants describing increased community discussions and collective mobilization triggered by campaign efforts. This aligns with Putnam's (2000) theory on social capital, which emphasizes that mobilization messages can enhance civic engagement by fostering social networks and collective action. It also supports the Nigerian-focused studies of Ibeanu (2015), who documented increased electoral participation linked to effective campaign outreach.

The study found that messages emphasizing community development, national unity, and economic improvement were the most influential, cited by over 70% of survey respondents. Additionally, campaigns delivered in native languages and positive, hopeful tones elicited stronger engagement, as highlighted in focus group discussions. Conversely, negative or attack campaigns had mixed effects: while they heightened awareness for some, they also discouraged others, confirming the ambivalence noted in the work of Ayoade (2014) and Folarin (2016). These findings suggest that positive, inclusive, and culturally resonant messaging is key to mobilizing voters, consistent with Norris's (2000) theories on political communication efficacy. The importance of



language and tone for building connection and credibility also corroborates emphasis on localized and culturally sensitive campaigning in Nigerian elections.

This study's mixed-methods findings demonstrate that Umuahia residents were extensively exposed to diverse campaign messages through both traditional and new media, which significantly shaped their voting decisions and broader electoral participation. Positive, development-oriented messaging, especially when culturally tailored, proved most effective, while negative campaigns yielded ambivalent effects. These outcomes largely reinforce existing literature on the evolving role of social media in political mobilization. However, the findings caution against over-reliance on negative tactics, which may undermine democratic engagement.

Conclusion

This study concludes that campaign messages significantly influenced voting behaviour and decision-making, enhancing voters' understanding of their choices and motivating active participation in the democratic process. Crucially, positive, development-oriented messages delivered in culturally resonant ways emerged as the most effective in fostering electoral participation, reinforcing the power of tailored communication to bridge political information gaps and inspire confidence in the electoral process.

Conversely, the study revealed the ambivalent impact of negative or attack campaigns, which, while attention-grabbing, risk alienating voters and undermining democratic inclusivity. This highlights the ethical imperative for political actors to prioritize constructive messaging that unites rather than divides.

Beyond individual voting, campaigns stimulated broader political participation, including rally attendance and voter mobilization, demonstrating the capacity of well-crafted messages to galvanize collective action and strengthen democratic norms at the grassroots level.

Recommendations

Political parties and candidates should leverage a combination of traditional media (television, radio) and digital platforms (social media) to reach a broader and more diverse electorate. Given the growing influence of social media among younger voters in Umuahia, campaign strategists must tailor content for these platforms to maximize engagement while ensuring accuracy and credibility.

Campaigns that focus on community development, economic improvement, and national unity resonate most effectively with voters. Political actors should emphasize constructive messages and avoid negative or attack-based campaigning, which can alienate voters and decrease political participation.

To increase the accessibility and impact of campaign messages, political parties should communicate in local languages and incorporate culturally sensitive approaches. This practice helps bridge communication gaps and fosters trust and identification between candidates and voters.

Electoral management bodies and civil society organizations should intensify voter education programs that inform residents about electoral processes and the importance of political participation beyond just voting. These initiatives can build on the momentum generated by campaigns to sustain civic engagement throughout and beyond election periods.

Regulatory agencies must enforce codes of conduct that discourage inflammatory, misleading, or divisive messages during campaigns. Transparent monitoring can help maintain a healthy democratic environment conducive to informed decision-making.

Stakeholders should promote forums, town halls, and community meetings that allow residents to engage directly with candidates and campaign messages. Such interactions enhance political discourse, accountability, and participatory democracy.



Political parties and researchers should utilize data from surveys and community feedback to continuously refine campaign strategies, ensuring they address voters' real concerns and preferences, thereby improving electoral outcomes and democratic satisfaction.

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