

## **Influence of Television Political Programmes on Voters' Opinion in the Nigerian 2015 General Election: A Study of "Politics Today".**

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**Abstract.** The mass media, especially the television medium has been found to be a powerful tool in shaping public opinion. The Nigerian political environment is one aspect the media cannot be silent about the study seeks to establish the influence of the television political programme (*Politics Today*) on the voting opinion of ABU undergraduate students in the 2015 general elections. The objectives of this study were to evaluate the frequency level of ABU undergraduate students viewership of Television political programmes, examine the level of ABU undergraduate students viewership exposure of and "Politics Today" television political programme during the Nigerian 2015 general elections and determine the influence "Politics Today" television political programmes on the voting opinion of ABU undergraduate students in the 2015 general election. The survey method was used. Questionnaire was designed and used as the research instrument. A total of 270 copies of questionnaire were distributed to respondents from six selected faculties in the university, out of which 260 copies were returned. Findings of the study show that ABU undergraduate students watch the programme occasionally and the programme influenced the voting opinion of the students in the 2015 general elections. Thus, it was recommended that television stations in Nigeria should produce more political programme to increase political awareness and also broadcast these programme on the internet for wider outreach.

**Keywords:** Media, Television, Influence, Programmes, Politics, Opinions, Election.

### **1. Introduction**

Throughout history, mass media have been a major source of information, education and public enlightenment. People depend on mass media to tell them what is happening around them, and all over the world. Mass media like television, newspaper, radio and magazine have their own specific advantages over the other. They all basically serve same purposes and their influences are enormously felt in the society. Just like food is a need to man, the media is part and parcel of our lives. Baran (2012:21) emphasizes the important role of mass media in our lives when he states that "no matter how we choose to view the process of mass communication, it's impossible to deny that an enormous portion of our lives is spent in interacting with the mass media".

Out of the numerous mass media, television is said to be outstanding and unique in its own way. This may be due to its ability to transmit words, sound and images simultaneously. Television has become a major tool for social change. Television's ability to communicate using pictures and sound simultaneously made it an effective medium. Pictures are devoted evidence of reality. Pictures tell a story better than words. Nkana (2005) clarifies that pictures can create effect and impact on television viewers. They are important in information dissemination and audience mobilization, and can cause people to act or not act depending on the point of view of the message they carry. One

way television is serving as a tool for social and cultural change is through programmes organized by television stations. These programmes are contents organized to serve various purposes and appeal to diverse interests. While some of the television programmes are live programmes, some are recorded. Television programmes have become a major consumer of audience time. It is true that Sleeping and working account for most of the time in a person's day, but TV watching ranks third (Dominick, 2011). This basically shows to an extent, how exposure to TV programmes has become man's habit. Television stations in order to attract and keep audience attention tend to strive hard in designing programmes that would not only sustain audience interest, but also affects the way they think.

One of the categories of programmes organized by television stations is the political programmes. As part of mass media informative, educative and watchdog functions, political programmes are presented to keep the public abreast of the political issues like elections, voter's registration, government policies that affect them directly. Candidates contesting for electoral office campaign via television, government officials are brought on television to defend government policies, achievement of a particular public office holder are shown on television, controversial political issues in the society are debated on television programmes. It is rational that television organizations follow the trend in the political environment in order to keep the public informed of the entire political process. However, Nkana (2015:230) summarizes that "the success of any television programme is determined by the response behavior of the viewers and the influence of the pictorial accompaniment of the message. However due to some political, environmental and structural variables, messages could be regarded otherwise and their results could be unexpected".

It is interesting to note that television stations in Nigeria have contributed and are still contributing to effective political mobilization and participation. There are numerous political programmes designed by different television

stations with the aim of educating the Nigerian citizens on the political happenings around the country. Not only do the Nigerian broadcast media possess enormous powers, but its role as an instrument of mobilization dates back to as far as 1965. In other words, the media has been a very active instrument in democratic processes in Nigeria over a stretch of time, until the military dictatorship took the shine from it. However, with the re-entry of civilian rule in 1999, the media via the broadcast media have resumed its active role of mobilizing the populace for elections. One of the numerous and popular political programmes is "Politics Today" on Channels Television.

During the 2015 elections, both at state and national level, the Nigeria mass media serve as the link between the people and the overall processes. Reporters were sent to various polling unit to report live to the stations. In the same vein, live discussion programmes were held to analyze and interpret issues as it concerns the process. With high reference to television stations, viewers are brought to the frontline of the electoral activities. This means that the relationship between the mass media and politics does not stop during political campaigns. It is therefore a continuous activity for the mass media to play the role of intermediary between citizens and their political environment at every point in time. It is against this background that the study seeks to examine the influence of the aforementioned political programmes in shaping voter's opinion in Nigeria.

## 2. Televised Political Programmes

A programme is a broadcast material created to meet certain specific needs or attain some set objectives, and transmitted to some predetermined target audience (Onabanjo, 2001). As one of the ingredient of broadcasting, messages refer to the transmitted symbols of words, sounds, actions, pictures, noise, gesticulations etc., that have been artistically translated into tangible products. These symbols usually begin as ideas, skills, feelings etc. which are encoded by the sender and decoded by the receiver. The products or messages are easily

and generally referred to as programmes in television.

Television stations all over the world create different forms of programmes to pass messages and fulfill certain needs of the target audience. One of such programmes is political programmes. Since the media exist to serve the people, and convey messages to the general public based on the happening in the society, political programmes are designed by television stations to educate and inform the audience about events occurring in the political environment. Television political programmes are mostly in form of discussion where you have two, three or four participants coming together to dwell on matters or a problem that affect the society. In television political programmes, there is a moderator who pilots the programme. Most times, specialist in political issues or a key figure in the national politics is invited to trash issues in the political atmosphere. Some of the political programmes being aired by television stations in Nigeria are 'Good morning Nigeria' on 'NTA', 'Focus Nigeria' and 'Matters' arising on 'AIT', 'Politics today' on Channels TV, and so on. These programmes are designed to meet the above objectives as stated by Onabanjo and studies (Larkin & Were, 2013; Throsby, 2013) have shown that these televised political programmes have influence on electorate in the area of formation of political knowledge and participation.

### 3. The 2015 General Election

Election is an ambiguous term that is opened to different definition and interpretation. Election is however an integral part of democratization process of a country. For any country who claims to practice democracy, it must give equal opportunity for its entire citizens to be able to occupy public offices and choose their representatives. The process of citizens selecting who represent them either at the local, state, or federal level is called election. Kompetenzzentrum (2004) cited in Adewale (2007:8) sees election as "a means of selecting the officers or representatives of an organization or by the vote of the qualified members and that election are means of making political choice by

voting so that leaders would be elected in the determination of issue". Election is a procedure recognized by the rule of an organization, be it a state, a club, a voluntary organization or whatever, where all, or some, of the members choose a smaller number of persons to hold an office, or offices, of authority within that organization (Dowse & Hughes, 1983).

Due to the importance of election in a democratic setting, countries all over the world set up independent body, fund and nurture to conduct elections and also issue certificate of return to the winners of the election. This is because it is believed that credible elections translate to maturity in the democratic sense of a country. However, according to Ndulo & Lulo (2010:4) "elections are not synonymous with democracy, but are a central component of a functioning democratic system". The issue of election has become very important in political discourse because it constitutes the fulcrum upon which rest the survival of democracy (Olujide, Adeyemi & Gbadeyan, 2011). Elections are central institution of democratic representative governments. The reason is that, in democracy, the authority of the government derives solely from the consent of the governed. The principal mechanism for translating that consent into governmental authority is the holding of free and fair elections (Awopeju, 2011).

The Nigeria 2015 general election was the fifth general elections held in the country since 1999 after the military hand over. Both the presidential and gubernatorial elections had the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressives Congress (APC) having major participants. However, the country for the first time since 1999 witnessed a major shift in power in the presidential election. It was an historical moment and consolidation of the country's democracy as incumbent president Goodluck Jonathan of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) lost to the candidate of All Progressives Congress (APC), Muhammadu Buhari. Also, at the state level, APC won in 29 states, while PDP won in 10 states of the federation. Furthermore, APC won majority of the seats in the National Assembly elections. Interestingly, Nigeria was

commended by world leaders, organizations and unions for conducting an election that redefined the country's democracy.

#### **4. The Concept of Public (Voter) Opinion**

According to Sambe (2008) that public opinion consists of those opinions held by public which government governments find prudent to heed. Public opinion is the sum of all private opinions of which government officials in some measures are aware and which they take into account in determining their official actions. Public opinion is seen as an aggregate result of individual opinions on public matter which affects group of people, a consensus among a varying, significant number of persons which emerges over-time from all the expressed views that cluster around an issue in debate. However, to

Asemah (2011) public opinions are the views, expressions and feelings held by the general members of the society about issues, events, happenings and occurrences in the society. These happenings may be at the local, national or international level. The media in our society are always available to reflect and regulate interests in our society. When they raise such issues, it becomes an issue of national discourse; this is because, it is either people are directly or indirectly influenced by the issues raised by the media. Sambe (2008) therefore cited in Asemah (2011:37) noted that "it is the aggregate of these views on issues that the concept 'public opinion' finds relevance.

To Lippmann (1922:18) public opinion consists of pictures inside men's heads and why the picture "so often misleads men in their dealings with the world outside, the pictures of themselves, of others, of their needs, purposes, and relationship" (Lippmann, 1922:19). In this case, voter opinion can also be described as the sum total of individual views, feelings and utterances which are either inferable or measureable and held by a group of persons over a particular candidate or party. Voting opinion ranges from belief that someone has formed regarding a political party or candidate to the

actual casting of vote to such political party or candidate in an election.

#### **5. Politics Today**

Politics today is a one hour weekly political programme aired by Channels TV every Sunday night at 8pm. The programme seeks to provide more in-depth and broader perspective to issues in the Nigerian political realm. It is also aimed at bringing viewers analysis from all angles for a better understanding. Putting into cognizance the complex nature of the political society, politics today is targeted to bring the political players to the forefront of the people. In achieving its objectives, the programme brings top political office holders, decision and policy makers, government officials in a view to get their opinion and decision on matters of public concern. Politics today allows for the direct participation of audience via social media networks like Facebook and twitter. During and after electioneering campaign, politicians are being invited on the programme to talk about their plans for the people, asked crucial questions and also, it has serve as avenue CEDE(AIT). The programme started in 2005 with a broad objective of analyzing and giving in-depth information on trending issues with huge focus on the Nigeria political environment. The programme runs from 10.00am to 11.00am Monday to Friday Since the inception of the programme, it has been able to attract viewers who depend heavily on media to make meaning out of the happenings around them. Focus Nigeria is a programme designed to engage all critical issues affecting Nigeria's polity, from politics to other subject matters that engage and affect the ordinary Nigerian. The discussion programme which currently has about 80,000 followers on both Facebook and twitter has the unique nature of inviting key policy makers to discuss issues affecting the political, economic and social development of the country. In 2009, it was reported that late president Umaru Musa Yar'adua threatened to revoke the operational license of Africa Independence television, AIT over what was described as threat to national security from the stations talk program Focus Nigeria. The presidency then accused the TV station of using the program to misinform and

incite the Nigerian people against the government. Same scenario played out in 2006 when the presenter of the show, Gbenga Aruleba was arrested for criticizing the Obasanjo administration. Till date, the programme is still one of Nigeria popular TV programmes that have been able to capture effectively events that occur in the Nigeria political atmosphere.

## 6. Statement of the Problem

The mass media has been found to be a powerful tool in shaping public opinion. The Nigerian political environment is one aspect the media cannot be silent about. In performing their functions as an educational institution and watchdog of the society, the media reports on government policies that affects us. Citizens make decisions based on the information they have at hand, and the mass media, especially television are sources from which these citizens get information. Consequently, there is a need for media organizations to always report and analyze issues as they affect the citizen. More so, television is an effective medium to shape public opinion because of its ability to transmit words, picture and sound simultaneously. Since 1999, Nigeria citizens have been observing their fundamental human rights. This is to vote and be voted for. The media have been up to the task in the coverage of these political issues. This was the same in the 2015 elections. Electorates were sensitized and mobilized using the mass media especially television. These political programmes are targeted to not only inform and educate the viewers, but also to help viewers make informed political decisions. It is on this gap in knowledge that this study seeks to examine the influence of Television political programme in Nigeria (*Politics Today*) influence on voter's opinion regarding their turnout, their choice of candidates and their political knowledge on the Nigerian general 2015 elections.

## 7. Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to establish the influence of the television political programme (*Politics Today*) on the voting opinion of ABU undergraduate students in the 2015 general

elections. The objectives of this study are as follows:

- To evaluate the frequency level of ABU undergraduate students viewership of Television political programmes.
- To examine the level of ABU undergraduate students viewership exposure of and "Politics Today" television political programme during the Nigerian 2015 general elections.
- To determine the influence "Politics Today" television political programmes on the voting opinion of ABU undergraduate students in the 2015 general election.

## 8. Scope of the study

The focus of the study is to investigate the influence of television political programme "Politics Today" programme on Channels TV on voters' opinion using undergraduate students of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Kaduna State, Nigeria as population of study. Hence, the scope of this study is restricted to those who are 18 and above due to the nature of the research. The research environment was also chosen because it houses an important section of the society that is 'youth' who are exposed to these media messages and at same time exercise their right of voting. For this reason, the university was chosen as a suitable research environment

## 9. Methodology

### Research Design

This research employed the use of survey method because the survey method is mostly employed to get an overview of the opinion of respondents.

### Population of the Study

The population for this study constitutes the entire 2015/2016 session of undergraduate students of Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, Kaduna State, Nigeria. Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria has a total of 12 faculties. 10 of the faculties are located at the main campus, Samaru : Arts, Education, Science, Social sciences, Medicine, Pharmacy, Engineering, Agriculture, Environmental design and Veterinary medicine while the other two

faculties: Law and Administration are located at the Congo campus. Data obtained from the University’s Management Information System (MIS) unit put the entire student’s population at thirty-six thousand, two hundred (36,200).

**Sampling Techniques**

This study deployed the use of both the simple random sampling and the purposive sampling techniques. Employing a simple random sampling, the researcher decided to use 6 faculties out of the 12 faculties. This is because according to Wimmer and Dominick (2014), a researcher does not need to study all elements in a population, the most important of all is to follow a sampling procedure that will avoid bias of any kind and each respondent should have an equal chance of being selected. This is the more reason the researcher used a simple random sampling which is a probability sampling technique to arrive at the number of faculties that were selected to represent the whole undergraduate students. The researchers selected 6 faculties from the draw. The faculties selected were: Arts, Education, Social sciences, Science, Engineering, and Law. The purposive sampling technique was also used. In using this technique, the researcher selected members of the population who are above 18years of age since it is the required age for voting in the country, those who voted in the 2015 election and those who are exposed to the television programme. These criteria will help to make sure that only people who are knowledgeable about the subject matter answer the questions asked.

**Sample Size**

The sample size selected was used for generalization to the entire population. The sample size of the study was calculated using the survey monkey online calculator. A confidence

level of 90 percent and error of margin of 0.5 were used to arrive at a sample size of 270. The sum of two hundred and seventy (270) copies of questionnaire was administered to the students. Furthermore, in order to arrive at a proportionate distribution of the instrument of data collection, the sample size was divided by the six (6) faculties selected. That is  $270/6$  which is equal to 45. This means that the researcher shared a total of 45 copies questionnaires in each faculty selected.

**Instrumentation**

The questionnaire adopted for this study is the close and open ended. This is to enable the respondents to select answers from the list of options provided. The Likert type scale of strongly Agree, (SA), Agreed (A), Disagreed (D) and Strongly Disagreed (SD) as well as the Yes and No response was used.

**10. Results**

In the course of the work, the researcher distributed 270 questionnaires to six faculties of the university and 260 copies of the questionnaires were collected. The sum of 40 copies of questionnaire was retrieved from faculty of Arts, 45 copies from faculty of Education, 41 copies from faculty of Science, 45 copies from faculty of Social Science, 45 copies from faculty of Engineering and 44 copies from faculty of Law. This makes a return rate of 96%. The return rate is presented in the tabular form below. The data gathered from responses of the respondents was coded using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software and interpreted in graphical illustrations in form of frequency tables.

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents**

Variables	Frequency	Average %
<b>Age</b>		
18-22	74	28.4
23-27	144	55.4
28-32	30	11.5
32 and Above	12	4.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>260</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	189	72.7
Female	71	27.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>260</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The above table indicates that a significant majority of the respondents are male. Perhaps, this is due to the ratio of both genders present as undergraduate in the university. According to the record released by the management information system (MIS) unit of the university in 2016, male undergraduate students are 24,100 while their female counterparts are around 12,100.

The table above shows that majority of the respondents are energetic and vibrant youths within the age bracket of 18-27years. This finding is however not unexpected because majority of university undergraduates students nowadays are within this age bracket. Also, 16.1% of the respondents fall within the age bracket of 28years and above.

**Table 2: Respondents frequency level of viewership of Television political programmes**

Variables	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Always	39	15.0
Often	72	27.7
Occasionally	107	41.2
Rarely	38	14.6
No Response	4	1.5

The above table illustrate that majority of the respondents (41.2%) watch the programme occasionally, 27.7% watch the programme often, 15.0% watch the programme always, 14.6% rarely watch the programme and 1.5% do not watch the programme. This implies that majority of the students watch the programme occasionally.

**Table 3: Respondents level of exposure to viewership of the television political programme *Politics Today* during the Nigerian 2105 General elections.**

Variables	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
High	73	28.1
Very High	65	25.0
Low	83	31.9
Very Low	35	13.5
No Response	4	1.5

The result above demonstrates that in the 2015 general elections, 28.1% of the respondents’ level of exposure to the television political programme “Politics Today” was high, 25.0% was very high, 31.9% was low, 13.5% was very low and 1.5% gave no response. This implies that the level of students’ exposure to viewership of the programme in the 2015 general elections is low. Hence, not majority of the citizens depend on the television to get information and be updated about the happenings in the political environment.

**Table 4: Influence of television political programmes “Politics Today” on the voting Opinion of the students in the 2015 general election.**

INDICES	SA	A	U	D	SD
The programme encouraged me to vote.	50 (19.2)	97 (37.3)	62 (23.8)	38 (14.6)	13 (5.0)
The programme made me decide my candidate choice.	48 (18.5)	72 (27.7)	66 (25.4)	55 (21.2)	19 (7.3)
The programme aided my understanding of political issues.	94(36.2)	97 (37.3)	52 (20.0)	14 (5.4)	3 (1.2)
The programme influenced my decision to vote wisely.	75 (28.8)	101(38.8)	59 (22.7)	19 (7.3)	6 (2.3)
The programme encouraged me to participate in political issues.	60 (23.1)	84 (32.3)	57 (21.9)	40 (15.4)	19 (7.3)

**Note: Figures in parentheses are percentages.**

The table reveals that 19.2% of the respondents strongly agreed that the programme encouraged them to vote, 37.3 % agreed, 23.8% were undecided, 14.6% disagreed and 5.0% strongly disagreed. This implies that the programme encouraged majority of the students to vote in the 2015 general elections. The above table indicates that 18.5% of the respondents strongly agreed that the programme made them decide their candidate choice, 27.7 % agreed, 25.4% were undecided, 21.2% disagreed and 7.3% strongly disagreed. This showed that majority of the programme influenced the student's candidate choice. The table above depicts that 36.2% of the respondents strongly agreed that the programme aided their understanding of political issues, 37.3 % agreed, 20.0% were undecided, 5.4% disagreed and 1.2% strongly disagreed. This implies that the programme aided majority of the students understanding of political issues. Data generated from the above table discovered that 28.8% of the respondents strongly agreed that the programme influenced their decision to vote wisely, 38.8 % agreed, 22.7% were undecided, 7.3% disagreed and 2.3% strongly disagreed. Hence, the programme influenced the voting decision of majority of the students. The above table presents that 23.1% of the respondents strongly agreed that the programme encouraged them to participate in politics, 32.3 % agreed, 21.9% were undecided, 15.4% disagreed and 7.3% strongly disagreed. This indicated that the programme encouraged majority of the students to participate in political issues.

## 11. Discussion

The data derived and interpreted in this study are further discussed here in relation to the study objectives. Table 2 depicts that majority of the students watch the television political programme "Politics Today" occasionally. It was discovered in table 3 that the level of students' exposure to viewership of the programme in the 2015 general elections is low. However, in relation to the above findings, study conducted by Liebowitz & Zentner (2012) has revealed that there is a general decline in the viewership rate of television programmes due to the coming of the internet. Findings from Table

4 revealed that the programme encouraged majority of the students to vote in the 2015 general elections. This gives credence to the assertion of Jebril, Stetka & Loveless (2013:15) that "the media serve as a tool for political mobilization. This is due to the fact that democracy will not work if people do not participate. People are educated via the media on the need for them to come out and vote the need to protect their votes and to the announcement of elections results". Also, findings from Table 4 observed that the programme influenced the student's candidate choice. This finding is reflected in the work of Blood (1999) who studied voting decision in the 1987 Australian election. Blood found that people who do not know a candidate to vote for (undecided voters) exposed themselves to media in order to acquire political knowledge that may later guide their voting decision while the already decided voters use the media because they are interested in politics. Furthermore, findings from Table 4 depict that the programme aided majority of the students understanding of political issues. Corroborating this, Charles, David & Olusola (2013) say that the media is actively involved in the shaping of citizens' perception of political issues through its educative, informative and enlightenment functions. This is to allow citizens make informed decision for the betterment of the society. Findings from Table 4 also revealed that the programme influenced the voting decision of majority of the students. The finding reflects the work of Hayes (2009) who believes that even with the growing numbers of television in the world, the influence of television on voting are overstated. Lastly, findings from Table 4 discovered that the programme encouraged majority of the students to participate in political issues. This supports the findings of Kwak and Wang (2004) that the mass media especially television and newspaper are influential in the mobilization of youths to participate in politics due to the fact that they are important for young people in building trust and confidence for the political process.

## 12. Conclusion

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the mass media especially

television are indispensable tool in the political process. The media do not only act as a mediator between the public and political environment, it also serves as forum to construct people's opinion and perception on political issues. The media are seen as agents of change or transformation in the political process. Simply, they serve as means for voters to make decisions by disseminating information about government actions. Also, television programmes are tools for political information, mobilization and are responsible for the formation of public opinion. During elections, when electorates have trust and confidence in a candidate or political party, they tend to vote for that candidate/political party. Therefore, it is pertinent to point out that media influences cognitive attitudes and the voters' feelings; and that there is an interaction between media and cognitive domains like religion, ethnicity, family and friends, candidates' image, current events and so on. Hence, findings from this study established that the television political programme "Politics Today" has influenced the voting opinion of ABU undergraduate students in the 2015 general elections.

### 13. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the researcher forward the following recommendations:

- Television stations in Nigeria should organize more political programmes in order to promote more political awareness among the people, mobilize the people towards the achievement of National goals and promote civic responsibility.
- Television stations, most especially Channels TV should start broadcasting the programme, "Politics Today" and other political programmes on the internet. This will attract more audience to the programmes and increase their viewership rate.
- The content, time and objectives of the programmes should be looked into and adjustment should be done where necessary.

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