

## Usage of Media Advocacy Education by the Independent National Electoral Commission on Voters' Turnout in Elections: A Study in Delta State, Nigeria

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**Abstract:** The study examines how the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Nigeria use media advocacy as a way to educate the electorates on election turnout in Delta state, Nigeria in the 2019 elections. The main objective of the study was to ascertain how media advocacy was used by INEC for voters' participation. The study was anchored on framing theory, which posits a social call for voters' turnout and behaviour. In order to ascertain the objectives of the study, a sample of 63 participants or electorates from the three senatorial districts in Delta state were administered with a questionnaire. Data collected and analysed showed that though media advocacy was capable of making voters to participate in election but it does not determines voter's behaviour during election. Media advocacy helped in voters' turnout, however, the level of age, level of education and political party affiliation, regionalism, money politics and ethnic group were strong factors for voters' turnout and behaviour during election. Consistent media advocacy education is required for voters' turnout and proper conducts during elections.. Media advocacy education is needed to influence positive ideas on a voter.

**Keywords:** Elections; Media advocacy education; Voters; Voters' turnout; Voter's behaviour

### 1. Introduction

Studies on media advocacy have largely been concerned with public health, public policy (Dorfman & Krasnow, 2014; Fayoyin, 2014), health

development and social causes (Wallack, 1994), propaganda tool for political organizations (Waibord, 2006), as a tool for organizing a community through a strategic engagement of the media to promote the adoption of public policy (Eze, 2014), and campaign against tobacco smoking and alcohol control (US Department of Health, 1988). Studies in media advocacy have also been on child rights issues (Oyesomi; Oyero; & Okorie, 2014), participatory agriculture (Abga; Abang; & Ugor, 2017), climate change (Okaka & Nagasha, 2017), election, family planning, water development (Eze, 2014), environmental management and so on. As a tool for advancing and supporting community, organizing and policy advocacy, media advocacy draws on theories from political science, cognitive linguistics, sociology, and other fields concerned with how public opinion is formed and how political behaviour is influenced (Dorfman & Krasnow, 2014). Dorfman and Krasnow argued that the target of media advocacy were policymakers to transform the social and natural environment of the target individuals. However, Gibson (2010) argued that media advocacy focused on behaviour not policy. Fayoyin (2014) says media advocacy is part of the broader health promotion and development communication programme intended to shape media coverage and ultimately affect the public agenda.

A study on media advocacy for effective climate change policy in Africa was investigated by Okaka and Nagasha (2017). The authors' objectives were the assessment of climate change adaptation awareness communication policy; social responsibility of the media in climate change; and the role of media information campaigns in policy, project, or research monitoring and evaluation process. The results of the study showed that climate

change policy awareness in many African countries is still very low, shallow, vague, and this had undermined behaviour change. These poor knowledge gaps were attributed to poor climate change communication policy, illiteracy, lack of research. The authors however, see poor media advocacy campaigns as the factor responsible for poor climate change communication policy among many African countries. Again, policy change was the centre theme of Dorfman's and Krasnow (2014), as well as Okaka and Nagasha (2017) studies on media advocacy.

However, none of the studies described above engaged media advocacy education on voters' turnout. Invariably, in every election, voter education is necessary to ensure that the electorates understand and know their rights, how to vote and understand the party's symbol. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2003), describes voter education as the dissemination of information, materials and programmes designed to inform voters about the specifics and mechanics of the voting process for a particular election. The goal of voter education, according to the UNDP, is to make information available and accessible to all constituents. Voters' education through media campaigns is not only necessary for voters' participation in the election but also to advocate for a better voting behaviour and to have elections that is free from violence and all kinds of electoral malpractices.

Despite series of media advocacy on election conducts from by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), independent bodies, election observers and monitoring groups, political parties and various stakeholders, voting is still characterized by so many problems. As noted by Ake (2001) as cited in Igiebor and Aihie (2016), the conduct of elections in Nigeria had always been characterised by pessimism, uncertainty and fears for the safety of lives and property. Delta State for example, elections are known to be violent because of some many factors. The state is a multi-ethnic state where the electorates vote according to their ethnic group and political party but really on the qualities or charisma of a candidate. Also, the two most contending political parties (The All Progressive Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party) are always struggling for the seat of power with violence, threats to life, arsons, betrayals and electoral malpractice and the use of fake security forces as well as guns during election.

Rather than serve as a means and a process of exercising legitimate political rights, elections in

Nigeria since independence, as Igiebor and Aihie (2016) argued, have turned into charade causing serious political turmoil threatening the survival of not only democracy but also Nigeria's corporate existence. For example, in the 2011, 2015, 2019 presidential elections in Nigeria, there were widespread protests, violence, deaths, and displayed persons across the country. By implication, the electoral system has been exploited to the detriment of the interest of majority of the people (Popoola, 2011). Perhaps, there is need to have more enlightenment campaigns or media advocacy on voters' education.

Given the above features of elections background in Nigeria, media advocacy education, perhaps could be necessary for voters' education, to change attitude and to increase participation in election. Consequently, the objectives of this paper among others are to:

- Determine how the Independent National Electoral Commission uses media advocacy education to advocate for voters' turnout in the 2019 election in Delta State.
- Ascertain whether media advocacy education is significant for voters' turnout in election
- Determine the relationship between media advocacy education and the behaviour of the electorates in election.

## 2. Literature Review

The review focused on media advocacy education, voters' turnout and behavior. As a media concept that calls for social change since the late 1980s, media advocacy serves as propaganda tool for political organizations and as platform for press entrepreneurs with political ambition and a pathway for political activism for reporters (Waibord, 2006). It therefore serves as tool for media discourse. Fayoyin (2014) believes that media advocacy is generally recognised as a strategy to influence public debate by engaging with and putting pressure on the mass media to focus on specific social issues. In this respect, media advocacy is expected to help the electorates to change their attitude or conducts that do not conform to the electoral laws and practice and to have active turnout in election. Fayoyin implies that media advocacy is a pre-planned and predetermined approach to ensure that media gatekeepers and other practitioners buy into issues being advocated.

Media advocacy education is therefore a persistent enlightenment and sensitization programme to inform and impart knowledge and skills in order to change

people's attitude and behaviour towards achieving specific goals or objectives. It is a campaign programme strategized to change attitude and behaviour on a social course. As Eze (2014) noted, strategic uses of news created through mass media (television, radio and newspapers) can promote public debate and generate community support for changes in community norms and policies. Eze held that attitudes, beliefs, norms, and practices are also shaped by media advocacy. This equally implies that media advocacy education can shape the electorates conducts in election. Media advocacy may be used for an ongoing campaign, perhaps to ensure voters' turnout better electorates conduct. For more than half a century, researchers have found that more educated citizens are more likely to vote in elections and participate in campaigns (Berinsky & Lenz, 2010). For some scholars, the reason for this relationship between education and voter turnout is clear. To them, education gives citizens the skills and resources needed to participate in politics (Berinsky & Lenz, 2010). Berinsky and Lenz believe that aside media advocacy, factors such as family background or cognitive skills may lead individuals to participate in election or voting.

Socio-demographic variables have been identified as factors for voters' turnout. Age, income and educational attainment are significant factors affecting voter's turnout (Berman, & Johnson, 2000). Educational attainment is perhaps the best predictor of voter's turnout while age difference is also associated with youth's voter turnout. For example, those holding advanced degrees were three times more likely to vote than those with less than high school education. Berman and Johnson's (2000) argument affirms age is an important factor in understanding voting behaviour. As strong political attitude may be considered one of the reasons behind voting and voter turnout, Pomante and Schraufnagel's (2014) research demonstrated that potential young voters are more willing to commit to vote when they see pictures of younger candidates running for elections/office or voting for other candidates. This implies that age is a factor for voting. Income level is another factor for voting behaviour. Those with higher income level tend to be more participatory in voting than lower income level (Harder & Krosnick (2008).

A study on gender gap in voter's turnout had been researched by Allen (2009). Allen found that female non-voters were more likely to cite general indifference to politics and ignorance or timidity regarding elections than male non-voters, and that female voters were less likely to cite fear of loss of

business or wages. Disbelief in politicians was provided as reason for women gap in voting. Identifying the causal factors for voter behaviour in India, Akhter and Ah- Sheikh (2014) study showed that the behaviour of a voter is influenced by several factors namely religious, money or charismatic personality of a leader, language, policy or ideology, extent of franchise and the political parties affiliated to, mass illiteracy, poor electoral campaign, and a host of other irrational forces can have their definite influence on the minds of the voters. Media advocacy education is needed to influence positive ideas on a voter.

Further studies on elections and voters' turnout often focused on various 'campaign effects' (Settle et. al., 2016). Invariably, an increase exposure to political advertisements is predictive of higher levels of voter turnout. In the view of Gallego (2010, as cited in Settle et. al., 2016), voters' turnout is influenced by awareness of television news, radio, and social media trending. Watching television, listening to the radio, following social media on election are components of media advocacy education. This invariably means that media advocacy on election can influence voters' turnout. By implication, political rally meetings with the electorates are capable of influencing voters' decision on turnout and conduct. Sharing their views on voters' turnout, Berinsky and Lenz (2010) believe that voter turnout is one of the crucial indicators of how citizens participate in the governance of their country. To them, higher voter turnout is in most cases a sign of the vitality of democracy while lower turnout is usually associated with voter apathy and mistrust of the political process. Because of its importance, media advocates and civil society actors, as well as the democracy support community and many other stakeholders are concerned why some citizens do not turn out to vote. They are also keen to understand the reasons behind low turnouts.

### 3. Theoretical Support

The study rests on Media Framing Theory. The concept of framing was first posited by Gregory Bateson in 1972 (Arowolo, 2017) and later by Goffman in 1974, as 'Frame Analysis' (Dorfman, & Krasnow, 2014). According to Arowolo (2017), framing describes the practice of thinking about news items and story content within familiar context. Framing is related to the agenda-setting tradition but expands the research by focusing on the essence of the issues at hand rather than on a particular topic. The basis of framing theory is that the media focuses attention on certain events and then places them within a field of meaning. According to Dorfman and

Krasnow (2014), framing is the process of reconciling new information with one's existing understanding. In an unconscious and automatic process, people weigh new information against well-formed ideas that have been reinforced in their thinking overtime.

Media framing is an extension of agenda setting. It described how audience come to new information they see or hear with preformed ideas about the way the world works, why problems occur, and who is responsible for solving those problems (Lakoff, 1996). To Arowolo (2017), framing theory explains that the media create this frame by introducing news items with predefined and narrow contextualisation. Frames can be designed to enhance understanding or are used as cognitive shortcuts to link stories to the bigger picture.

### 3.1 Principles/Assumptions of Framing Theory

The theory holds among other things that:

- The media present something to the audience or called 'the frame' and it influences the choices people make about how to process that information. It deals with how the media formed ideas or issues to the audience by the way or manner the news or message is presented.
- Media framing draws audience attention to certain attributes of the objects or issues of the news coverage.
- Media framing helps individuals interpret data so that their experiences can be understood in a wider social context
- Media framing works to organize or structure message meaning or by helping audience make meaning from media message.

In the light of this study, media framing as a key component of media advocacy (Dorfman & Krasnow, 2014) deals with the process by which people extract meaning from content of all kinds, including words, pictures, or interactions. By news or media message framing by the news media on voters' turnout and behaviour, media advocacy calls for social and political change on the electorates.

Media framing and advocacy are strategic use of mass media to advance public concerns, debates and policy on national issues like voters' turnout, participation and electoral violence. Electoral issues can be framed by the media for public discourse that when consistently and persistently discussed it can become a working tool or framework for public policy. The basis of framing theory is that the media

focused attention on certain issues and places importance on them. Peaceful, free and fair election as well as violent free election can also be tied to media framing and advocacy. Media framing and advocacy must be consistent to gain public acceptance. Consistent and persistent advocacy or campaigns are capable of influencing or inducing positive electorates change. Dorfman and Krasnow (2013) reasoned that media advocacy adopts approaches that are social, political and economic in nature in order to bring about social change. The authors also argued that media framing and advocacy are directed to personal behaviour. In their analysis for example, personal behaviour is the only part of what determines health status, and when media advocacy is directed towards health issues, it brings about the individual's understanding and knowledge of his/her health status. In the same vein, media framing and advocacy on elections matters can be directed towards behaviour of the electorates in order to achieve electoral behaviour as expected in election.

It is taken therefore in this theory that media framing and advocacy are communication approaches to advance electoral change. Voters' turnout is an agenda that should be set by the media advocating for peaceful elections.

## 4. Methodology

A survey of 75 voters from different local governments in Delta state was selected. Using the Krejcie Robert and Morgan Daryle determination of sample size of 1970, a sample size of 63 with 0.05 degree of accuracy and margin error was adopted from a population of 75 voters or respondents in the three Senatorial Districts in Delta State. The representation size (63) of the population was equally distributed to three local government secretariats in each of the three Senatorial Districts in Delta State. They were Oshimili South Local Government Council in Asaba, representing Delta North Senatorial District; Ethiope West Local Government Council, Oghara representing Delta Central Senatorial Districts and Warri South Local Government Council representing Delta South Senatorial Districts. Each one of these local government secretariats was administered with 21 copies of the questionnaire. The choice of the local government council secretariats for the administration of questionnaire was because it is one of the most appropriate places to contact civil servants in a matter of this nature (election as civil duty). Research assistants were hired for the purpose of administering the instrument in each of the secretariats mentioned above. Data collected in tables

1 to 4 were measured by the ‘yes or no’ options and analysed in percentage. Data in table 5 were measured using Likert scale following a response pattern of a 5-1 point (5 = I strong agree; 4 = I agree;

3 = I undecided; 2=I strongly disagree and 1=I disagree). The data in table 5 were analysed in mean and chi-square to test hypotheses.

**5. Presentation of Results in Tables**

**Table 1:** How Media Advocacy Education was used by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to Promote Voters’ Turnout in Election Delta State

The followings could be sensitisation techniques used by INEC to promote voters’ turnout in election. Identify the one you know that was mostly used in the 2019 election in Delta state.

Options	Freq. (63)	(100 %)
Posters	10	15.8
Billboards on strategic places	15	23.8
Radio	08	12.6
Television	19	30.1
Newspaper	03	4.76
Social media	03	4.76
Town hall meeting	05	7.93
Town crier	00	00

**Table 2:** Most Understood Media Advocacy Education Technique

Which to you is the most effective media advocacy technique used by INEC for voters’ turnout in terms of easy understanding of the message?

Options	Freq. (63)	(100%)
Posters	15	23.8
Billboards on strategic places	11	17.4
Radio	09	14.3
Television	20	31.7
Newspaper	04	6.3
Social media	00	00
Town hall meeting	04	6.3
Town crier	00	00

**Table 3:** Most Persuasive Communication Strategy Use

Which one of these below is the most persuasive as media advocacy techniques used by INEC for voters’ turnout in the election?

Options	Freq. (63)	(100%)
Posters	05	7.93
Billboards on strategic places	07	11.1
Radio	10	15.8
Television	16	25.4
Newspaper	00	00
Social media	13	20.6
Town hall meeting	07	11.1
Town crier	05	7.93

**Table 4:** Rating INEC Performance on the Media Advocacy Strategies Use

Rate INEC performance in terms of the media advocacy strategies used for voters’ turnout and behaviour in the 2019 election in Delta state.

Options	Freq. (63)	(100%)
Very good	09	14.3
Good	22	34.9
Fairly good (average)	18	28.5
Poor	14	22.2
Very poor	00	00

**Table 5:** Determine whether media advocacy education is significant for voters' turnout in election and voter's behaviour

S/N	Items	Options SA	A	UD	SD	D	Mean
1	Attitude towards election is guided by level of age and level of education not media advocacy.	17	28	00	13	05	3.61
2.	Media advocacy education is essential for free and fair election.	11	31	00	16	5	3.42
3.	Voters' turnout in election is not tied to voter media advocacy education.	13	26	00	24	00	3.44
4.	Poor public enlightenment campaigns on election can be reason for low turnout in election.	09	11	03	51	00	3.17
5.	People turn out to vote not because of media advocacy education but because it is their civil duty.	13	33	02	13	02	3.66
6.	Media campaign on electoral conducts is not significant to the rate of voters' turnout but other factors like political party and ethnic group of the candidate.	10	03	00	43	07	2.46
7.	Money and vote buying is a strong influence on the electorate's behaviour.	14	27	08	14	00	3.65

*Mean point/point of decision (3.00) and (n-63).*

**Data Tested**

The first hypothesis was to ascertain if attitude towards election is guided by level of age and level of education and not media advocacy (item 1 in table 5)

The second hypothesis was to ascertain the relationship between media advocacy education and the behaviour of the electorates in election.

**Data Results**

Attitude towards election is guided by level of age and level of education not media advocacy.	There is no relationship between media advocacy education and the behaviour of the electorates in election.
Chi-square 17.444	34.540
Df. 3	4
SPSS, Version 23	

Where calculated  $\chi^2 >$  critical  $\chi^2 @ .05$ , an association exist between the variables, implying that attitude towards election was guided by level of age and level of education not media advocacy and there was no relationship between media advocacy education and the behaviour of the electorates in election.

**Hypothesis 3:** The third hypothesis was to ascertain if voters' turnout in election was due to media advocacy education.

**Hypothesis 4:** The fourth hypothesis was to ascertain the relationship between voters' turnout in election and voter media advocacy education.

There is relationship between voters' turnout in election and voter media advocacy education.	There is a relationship between media advocacy education and free and fair election.
Chi-square 4.667	23.560
Df. 2	3

Where calculated  $\chi^2 >$  critical  $\chi^2 @ .05$ , data were statistically significant. An association exists between the variables, implying from the result of the third hypothesis that there exist a relationship between voters' turnout in election and media advocacy education. Media advocacy is therefore capable of making voters to participate in election. Also, media advocacy education can help to promote free and fair election.

## 6. Discussion of Results

The data collected were pooled and analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency counts, percentage and chi-square. The sample size (n=63) consisted of 42 male respondents representing 66.6% and 21 responses representing 33.3 % of the female respondents'. Issues of election and voting, males were always dominants. In the age ranges, ages between 18-27 were 9 responses representing 14.3% of the respondents; between 28-37 were 14 responses representing 22.2% of the respondents; those between 38- 47 were 36% of the respondents. Those respondents from 48 age and above were 17 representing 26.9%. Voting participation is always dominated by young people. The study showed that ages between 28 to 37 and above were active in voting participation and in most cases these age ranges formed the violent behaviour in elections. These are basically the active and violent age participation in elections. The participants or respondents that have secondary education were 18 representing 28.5% and those with higher education were 45 representing 71.4%. On marital status, there were 20 respondents representing 31.7% that were not married while 43 respondents representing 86.3% were married. Election is a process where people chose someone to represent them. Election is casting for a better change. All the respondents were civil servants working in the local government council secretariats in the three Delta State Senatorial Districts.

Answers to objective one of the study were provided in Table 1. Objective one was to determine how the Independent National Electoral Commission uses media advocacy education to advocate voters' turnout in the 2019 election in Delta State. The Table showed that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) used posters, billboards, radio jingles, television campaigns, newspaper advert, social media platforms, and town hall meeting as media advocacy education techniques in the 2019 election in Delta State. However, as obtained, television campaign was the most used media advocacy technique for voters' turnout in election. Television because of its features of sounds and images has the ability to influence change. Television is believed to make the most impact on the audience (Banjo, Adebambo & Dairo, 2009). This is because of its audio-visual advantage. It leaves a lasting impression in the minds of the audience. Television can reach diverse people simultaneously and provide opportunity for a message to be demonstrated in images or pictures. Banjo, Adebambo and Dairo (2009) showed that television is effective in creating

awareness about public health and environmental issues. Television is often associated with their wide geographical coverage in contrast to the print media. Television and radio are effective media advocacy communication tools that could be used to raise public awareness and consciousness towards voters' turnout with a high degree of effectiveness.

Of all the advocacy or campaign techniques used by INEC to make eligible Nigerians to participate or turnout for election and avoid violent behaviour in election, the respondents' indicated television (31.7%) as the most understood; this was followed by posters (23.8%) and billboards (17.4%) in strategic locations. Television again has the ability to change perception through it clear demonstrated images illustrated. Posters and billboards are visual communication techniques that can be clearly used to demonstrate action or messages. Placed in strategic locations, posters and billboards captured the eyes and attention of the beholder. Messages are served or passed when the eyes raise obvious attention. The respondents were consistent in their answers as shown in the first two tables on the three media advocacy education techniques of television campaigns, billboards and posters used by INEC. Consistency of answers implied that the respondents not only understood the question presented to them but also they participated in the election. Since television campaign was the most understood media advocacy technique used by INEC for voters' turnout and to stop violent election, the result further showed that it was the most persuasive communication strategy used by INEC. This further explained the impact of television viewing on audience especially consistent audience.

The results obtained so far on the persuasive impact of television correspond with the theory of media framing. A regular television viewer especially on political and election matters is bound to be influenced by the way, manner and rate political or election news is framed in the media. It is instructive to know that the degree to which the broadcast media devote air time to election and political news also affect people's attitudes towards election participation. As it were, heavy dependency and exposure to the media tend to shape people's beliefs and perceptions about various issues of life. Aptly put, the degree of dependency on the media is a key variable that help to explain why audience's beliefs, feelings or behaviours are altered. In other words, news framing by the news media has a way of influencing our perception on the issue presented. The news media can raise an issue, make it a hot national debate and discourse over a period of time

and also has the power to 'kill' the issue. This is media presentation, a postulation that holds the media have the 'raising and falling' power over an issue pertaining to public interest. Media framing is clearly media presentation of what the media interpret, see as important and present to us as news. Framing focus on how media draws the public's eye to specific topics and then it takes a step further to create a frame, through which the audience will comprehend such information. Creating frames for stories starts from the sources, reporters or editors, and to the audience. This is why media framing is media presentation. Media framing on elections over a time can form electoral behaviour.

Objective two of the study was to determine whether media advocacy education was significant for voters' turnout in election. Average mean and chi-square analyses were used to obtain results. At a point where calculated mean-point was  $3.44 > 3.00$ , it was agreed that media advocacy education on elections was essential for free and fair election but voters' turnout in election was not tied to voter's media advocacy education ( $3.17 > 3.00$ ). It can be taken that media advocacy on election was not significant for voters' rate of turnout. From the results of the average mean and chi-square analyses, media advocacy was capable of making voters to participate in election but not significant for voters' rate of turnout but other social factors can namely like political party affiliation, regionalism, money politics and ethnic group.

As a way of contribution to existing studies, the study showed that voters' behaviour was guided by level of age and level of education not really media advocacy education; and there was no relationship between media advocacy education and the behaviour of the electorates in election. The behaviour of the electorates during election was largely influenced by factors mentioned above. Though media advocacy was capable of making voters to participate in election as well as promote free and fair election but media advocacy education does not determine voter's attitude or behaviour during election. As ascertained, the factors that determine voters' behaviour were level of age, level of education and political party affiliation, regionalism, money politics, promise of big political appointment and ethnic group. These social factors are strong and influential forces in voters' turnout and behaviour in Nigeria. Media advocacy education is a reminder to vote and to follow the rules and voting guidelines.

## 7. Conclusion and Recommendations

Election in Nigeria is very difficult and complex project that needs a lot of media advocacy and

education to make the electorates not only to be informed or participate but to have the right behaviour or conduct during election. Media advocacy education is a social call to change. The various strategies adopted by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) namely posters, billboards, radio, television, social media and town hall meeting are capable of making voters to participate in election but these media advocacy education strategies do not determine voter's attitude and proper conducts during election. Basically, the level of age, level of education and political party affiliation, regionalism, money politics and ethnic group are strong determinants of a voter's turnout and conducts especially in violent elections. Obviously, the use of money, the power of religion and ethnic affiliations by politicians had often truncated media advocacy education for proper conducts in elections. It is appalling that these factors influenced voter's far more than that of media advocacy education used by INEC. Media advocacy should be consistently directed towards electoral behaviour or conducts as expected in a violent-free election. INEC should have regular meetings with all registered political parties prior to election to ensure free and fair election. The door-to-door campaign should be adopted to increase voters' turnout and participation in election.

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