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Impact of Media on Political Awareness in the 2023 General Election in Nigeria: A Study of Some Selected Radio Stations in Gombe State

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ABSTRACT

Media, both mainstream and social, are now the hallmark of socioeconomic and political life in contemporary societies. It serves as a viable option for reaching a large audience in a limited time. Nigeria is a populous country with a widespread geographical terrain that makes physical contact, especially by politicians during campaigns, a herculean task. However, the advent of the media eased the process of campaigning, political communication, and awareness creation among the electorates in the Fourth Republic. One area where the media plays a significant role in political communication is Gombe State during the 2023 General Election. This study examines the impact of the media on political awareness in the 2023 General Election in Gombe State using some selected radio stations. The study adopted a mixed-methods research design. Data were obtained from fieldwork and documented sources. Questionnaires were administered in selected areas using purposive random sampling, while key informant interviews were conducted with relevant stakeholders in addition to FGD. The collected data were discussed and analysed using non-automated SPSS. The study reports that the media played an influential role in shaping public opinion, perception, and voting choice and pattern in Gombe State. This remarkable feat was achieved because local languages, particularly Hausa, were being used as the lingua franca. It is recommended that civic education programmes be sponsored by NGOs and other institutions that support democracy to create conscience and empower the locals to follow policies and be involved in the policy-making process, as well as to continue to participate in elections in the future.

Keywords: Political Communication, 2023 General Election, Gombe State, Nigeria, Political Awareness, Radio Stations

INTRODUCTION

Political communication is an essential aspect of democratisation in both advanced and emerging democracies in the 21st century. Democracy offers to guarantee the liberty of freedom of speech and citizens' active participation (Feldman & Zmerli, 2019). The media is ancillary to actualising the role of effective communication flow among actors in democracy. The media is not only disseminating information and creating awareness, but it is also a guardrail of democratic liberty (Tesler & Zaller, 2017). The politicians and parties found the media to be an inevitable tool that is effective in quickly reaching out to the electorate to persuade them and get their support and votes. The electorate found the media a strategic tool for measuring and analysing contestants and parties to determine their choices (Katz, 2017). Thus, political communication links all political actors in a relationship that enables choice and participation. In modern democracies, the media is perceived as the platform that propels democratic governance and safeguards citizens from misinformation and unnecessary propaganda (Blumler, 2017). Yet, not all the time, the media is positively impacting democratisation. Politicians and parties sponsored and used propaganda, including fake news, disinformation, and lies, against their opponents to win the support of the electorate. The essence of media in the political process was experienced during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, when all political activities, such as physical campaigns, were abruptly halted by travel bans, lockdowns, and bans on social relationships, including physical contact (Coman et al., 2021; Van Aeslt, 2022). Yet, periodic elections must be conducted because substantive elective offices approach their tenure end and new elections must be held to avoid confusion and illegality. The media was effectively utilised during the period to reach out to the voters across many countries that held elections during the period.

Political communication is vital in particularly populous states. Indeed, all democracies today rely on the media, but smaller states have fewer challenges reaching their electorates than bigger ones (Iyengar &

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Simon, 2000). For example, politicians and parties in Gambia may not find it more difficult to reach out physically to the electorate than in Nigeria. Nigeria, with an estimated population of 218 million, six geopolitical zones, three tiers of government, and 450 ethnic groups, is difficult to campaign in without effective utilisation of the media. The Fourth Republic (1999–2023) was consummated based on the role that the media played in pressuring the military to restore Nigeria to a democratic path. One of the main reasons why political campaign expenditures are high in Nigeria is media spending (Onyekpere, 2015). Major parties spent billions during the 2023 General Election to sway the opinions of voters to support them (European Union, 2023). The resurgence of democratisation in Nigeria in 1999 heralded the proliferation of media houses, both public and private, mainstream and electronic, and social media. The media serves as the wheel of motion for democratic activities in Nigeria. Many states across the country recorded tremendous achievements in the establishment of state-owned media houses and the granting of licences to private media houses.

One of the states that is perceived to have experienced rapid development in media activities and development is Gombe State. In essence, the state is considered the fastest-growing in Nigeria and one of the states that are recording democratic good governance. Thus, whether democratic progress is related to media freedom and development can be seen from the perspectives of the role played by the media and the responses and actions of political actors. Gombe State now has seven radio stations, with one belonging to the State Government, another owned by the Federal Government, four owned by private media stations, and one owned by the Federal University of Kashere in Gombe State, Nigeria (Gombe State Government, 2023). This study examines the impact of media on political awareness in the 2023 General Election in Nigeria, taking the case of some selected radio stations in Gombe State. The study utilised a mixed-methods research design where data were collected from both fieldwork and documented sources. The study is structured into five sections: introduction, methodology, literature review, discussions and findings, and conclusion.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study adopted a mixed-methods research approach to data collection and analysis. Data were collected from both fieldwork and documented sources. The field work consists of four sources: a fieldwork survey with participants, in-depth specialised informants' interviews, Focus Group discussions, and personal participant observation.

The population of the study is Gombe State, which is the area of the research. The population of Gombe State is estimated at 3,960,100 based on the 2006 Population Census projection. The total population is 3,960,100 according to three senatorial zones revealed the following: The population of Gombe North Senatorial Zone is 1,752,200; The population of Gombe Central Senatorial Zone is 993,200; and The population of Gombe South Senatorial Zone is 1,214,900.

The sample for the study was taken from the population based on the minimum margin of error suggested by the Taro Yamane formula. The sampling design for the survey based on the Taro Yamane formula picked from the automated table is 380. The number is distributed based on senatorial geopolitical zones, and the total number of respondents from each senatorial zone is determined by the formula as follows:

Table 1. Sample Design

Gombe North Senatorial Zone	1,214,900×100÷3,960,100	44.24%	168
Gombe Central Senatorial Zone	993,200×100÷3,960,100	25.08%	96
Gombe South Senatorial District Zone	1,124,900×100÷3,960,100	30.68%	116

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	Total	380

Five sources of data were used. The first is a survey where respondents were identified based on some formulas and considerations. A total of 380 respondents were interviewed through questionnaire administration. The respondents were selected based on an automated Taro Yamane formula from three senatorial zones: Gombe North, Gombe Central, and Gombe South. Gombe State was chosen for this research because it is considered by many opinions in the media as the fastest-growing State in the current democratic dispensation; it is the hub of the Northeast States of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, and Yobe; it has the highest number of radio stations and media activities in the Northeast; and it is, though one of the smallest states, among those with the highest number of radio stations in the country. The survey was carried out in four local government areas, each at least in a senatorial zone. In Gombe North, Gombe Local Government was chosen, which is the urban centre in the state and also the most populous area, to give a balance of views between the rural and urban populations. In Gombe Central, Akko was chosen based on its higher population than Yamaltu/Deba because there are only two local governments in the zone. In Gombe South, Billiri and Kaltungo were chosen for the survey.

The second source of data from field work is in-depth, specialised interviews with informants. In this segment, informants were selected from four categories: Category A is the politicians and party executives from three major parties that performed better in the 2023 General Election in the country and the state, including the All Progressives Congress (APC), the Labour Party (LP), and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). Category B is the proprietors or staff of the chosen radio stations. Category C is academic. Category D is the leaders of the association of radio listeners in the state. A total of 15 informants were selected and interviewed from the four groups: 3 in category A, 5 in category B, 3 in category C, and 4 in category D. Three major criteria were used to select the informants. The first criterion is accessibility. Those that are easily accessed by the researcher based on connection were consulted. The second criterion is the possession of quality relevant information related to the subject matter of study, and the third criterion is the reference to the suggestion of a minimum number of 4 and a maximum of 30 for a qualitative interview as provided by Creswell (2014). The minimum is if the subject matter is adequately covered and only an additional gap is needed; the maximum is if the subject of study is fresh and there is a need to have numerous views from field work. This study adopted a middle-ground approach in between. The interviews were conducted between April and May 2023.

The third source of data is Focus Group Discussions (FGD). In this category, one group was formed with members representing members of civil society from various categories, including the Inter-Party Advisory Council (IPAC), representatives of the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW), representatives of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), and the National Union of Local Government Employees (NULGE). The FGD was held in May 2023. The fourth source of data is personal participant observation. The researcher is an academic and a current affairs analyst who frequently visited radio stations for live and recorded programmes. Being an active observer, the researcher studied and observed the level of feedback, participation, characteristics of the audience when they called to express their views in live programmes, and the numerous daily calls and messages that he received as feedback. The fifth source of data is documented materials, including books, journal articles, and internet sources, which were used to critically review the literature and form the framework of analysis.

The study uses different tools for data collection. For the survey, structured questionnaires were used with multiple choices to respond for the chosen respondents. The questionnaire was validated, and its reliability was certified by an expert in the field. The questionnaires were administered by the author and research assistants across the selected areas. The in-depth, specialised informants' interviews were carried out using unstructured questionnaires to enable the free flow of views to the saturation point. For the FGD, face-to-face discussions were conducted with the selected participants in Gombe, the State capital. For the personal participant observation, physical and personal experience, diary recording, and observation were used, while the Google search engine and online libraries were used for data collection in the documented source.

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The techniques used for data analysis differed from one source to another. For the survey, non-automated SPSS was used and presented in tabular mode with simple percentages to determine the responses. For the in-depth specialised interviews, the data obtained were coded by group, the informants were assigned a code of A, B, C, and D, themes were identified, and the most important views were extracted and presented. For the FGD, the views were transcribed, coded into themes, and the most necessary views extracted. For the personal participant observation, the generated data were reported. Overall, tables, charts, and content analysis were used for data analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Political Communication: The State of the Discipline

Political communication is perceived as a political language. It is the intention of senders to influence the political environment and elicit a favourable response from the audience (McNair, 2018). Put differently, political communication is "purposeful communication about politics" (McNair, 2018:4). This purposeful communication is further elucidated by Mc Nair (2018) as all forms of communication undertaken by politicians and other political actors to achieve political objectives, communication initiated and addressed to political actors by voters and media practitioners, and communication about these actors and their activities from the media, either sponsored by political actors or by the media and voters. It is also seen as the role of communication in the political process by Kaid (2004), indicating that the media is vital in influencing political activities in democracies. Political communication and media are intricately linked together; without political communication, there will be no democracy, stress Stromback et al. (2011). Political participation is more effective if the media is involved, especially during campaign periods, added Stromback et al. (2011). The structure of communication shapes the structure of politics in modern societies (Jamieson & Kenski, 2017).

Democracy requires an informed, socialised, and knowledgeable electorate that will dictate democratic politics pursued in the public sphere. This is the connecting cord between democracy, politics, and the media. The media facilitates democratic processes by informing the citizens, educating the citizens, especially the voters, providing a platform for public political discourse, giving publicity to policies and governmental processes, and serving as a channel for advocacy (McNair, 2018). In essence, the media is an active political actor in contemporary democracies. Media played several roles in political promotion through aestheticisation, branding, broadcasting and narrowcasting, campaigning, consumerism, cynicism, dealignment, dumbing down, e-representation and e-politics, emotionalisation, framing, the hegemonic model, image-making, ideological advancing, informing, legitimisation, marketing, advertising, and the manufacture of consent (Lilleker, 2006). These sets of activities are believed to have been influential in affecting audiences' voting behaviour during elections and policymaking. Different political actors are guaranteed space by the media as a public sphere to articulate their interests, express and form opinions, exchange arguments and counterarguments, and circulate information freely (Feldman & Zmerli, 2019).

The media has several effects on the political process. First, it creates public opinion through polls and feedback. Political communication influences voting behaviour in a given political environment, especially through campaigns. However, political communication has effects on the cost of politics in modern democracies, such as the rising cost of campaigning, the commercialisation of politics, and undue propaganda (McNair, 2018). The nature of social influence and social communication in election campaigns is shaped by the patterns of social contexts. This has been substantially established by evidence from the works of Emile Durkheim, Herbert Tingsten, and V. O. Key (Huckfeldt & Sprague,

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1995). The role of political communication is consistent with democratic quality in both old and new democracies. The free flow of information among political actors and society improves democratic governance, as observed by Pfetsch & Esser (2004). Political marketing is a vital contribution of the media to democratic promotion. Political marketing is the process of presenting and promoting political issues, social imagery, candidates' personalities, situational contingency, and epistemic value. This is more evident in the digital age (Newman, 1994; Newman & Perloff, 2004; Perloff, 2014). Political campaign strategy gradually but drastically changed and shifted from direct physical engagement to media ads and political agenda-setting by politicians and parties (Stockwell, 2005).

Political communication as a discipline of study traces its roots, according to Kaid (2004), to the discourses of Plato and Aristotle. However, Rogers (2004) postulates that the emergence of communication studies, mass communication, and political communication are disentangled. The study of political communication gained essence in the era of the First and Second World Wars but flourished more during the Cold War period and the globalisation era. Walter Lippmann's Public Opinion is considered the pioneer work or foundation of modern studies and theoretical building in political communication. Lippmann's contribution centred on identifying the effects of propaganda, public opinion, and the agenda-setting process in the interwar years. Lippmann identified the role of mass media in opinion formation in a democracy (Rogers, 2004). Harold Lasswell followed suit in situating the role of propaganda during the First and Second World Wars. Another important scholar in the development of political communication studies is Paul F. Lazarsfeld. He led the Radio Research Programme funded by the Rockefeller Foundation in 1937. The programme explored the effects of radio on Americans voting behaviour and political socialisation (Rogers, 2004).

In the post-War era. Wilbur Schramm was recognised as the leading scholar of political communication studies. Schramm produced Doctoral students at Stanford University who spread across the United States, fanning the embers of studies in political communication. The concentration of studies on political communication in the 1960s was on the role of media in forming opinion, propaganda, policy support, and the perception of the public about the Cold War and global security (Rogers, 2004). The development of political communication studies in the post-War years was motivated by the spread of television. By 1960, most Americans relied on television for news and information. In 2001, 56% of the American public responded in surveys that television was their main source of political news, 24% said newspapers, and 14% said radio (Rogers, 2004). But the internet is dislodging television and creating a new political communications ecology in the modern era (Gurevitch et al. 2009). Bernard Cohen (1963) presented a thesis that marked a watershed in the study of political communication in 1963 when he argued that "the media may not be successful in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think" (Cohen, 1963:13). Cohen's (1963) submission reveals that the media has direct and indirect effects on forming public opinion on political behaviour and voting attitudes. The early foundation of political communication is enigmatic because of its embrace of a multidisciplinary approach. The above founding fathers of political communication drew their analogies from thinkers in Sociology, Political Science, Anthropology, Psychology, Linguistics, Journalism, Public Relations, and Economics (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008).

Apart from efforts in literature building, the study of political communication is graced with theory building, both normative and empirical. De Tocqueville (2019) argues that the difference between a democratic and an authoritarian state is the enabling environment for freedom of speech. This view is followed by Mill's (2003) opinion that complete liberty of opinion is a precondition for positive

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democratic development. Schulz (2014) opines that well-informed citizens are instrumental to democratic development, and the media is the wheel to shoulder this task. Lerner (1963) assumes that the transition from traditional to modern societies requires increasing urbanisation, literacy, mass media activities, economic participation, and active political participation. This view is advanced by Herbert Marcuse (1965) in his suggestion that unlimited tolerance is necessary to emancipate citizens through a free and equal flow of information. Jurgen Habermas (1989) postulates that newspapers developed into platforms for the political discourses of citizens aiming to control their government in the Industrial age.

In the wake of the 20th century, political communication processes underwent structurally radical changes, being technologically driven from one systemic order to another, and Blumler (2015) argues that this new development has been adequately catered for consciously by the 65 contributions in the Oxford Handbook of Political Communication as a new breakthrough in theoretical building in the discipline. Nimmo (1977) believes that theorising political communication requires a good understanding of the characteristics of political communicators, the usage of symbols, language, and persuasion, the media of political communication, the audiences of political communication, the effects of political communication, and the methods in the study of political communication.

Normative theories border on media politics, media law, and media research, accommodating international debates on the balanced flow of information, agenda-setting, and national regulations and laws. Theories like Four Theories of the Press advanced by Fred S. Siebert, Theodore Peterson, and Wilbur Schramm (1963), Freedom of the Press by Jürgen Wilke (1984), The Ideas Behind American Journalism by Herbert Altshull, Democracy and Media by Andreas Beierwaltes' (2000), Three Models of Media and Politics by Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini (2004), and Jesper Strömbäck's Four Models of Democracy (2005) provide comprehensive overviews of the issues, approaches, and literature.

Political communication lacked support in the internationalisation of research and comparative discourse as a field of study in its stages of development until the 1990s (Pfetsch & Esser, 2004). And it is much more difficult to study political communication without adequate comparison to enable an understanding of cultures and how they shape the influence of media on political communication. The mass media is instrumental in propelling democratisation in the 'Third Wave'. The formerly autocratic countries of Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, and Southern Europe began to establish democratic institutions, and the media developed an interest in processes of social and political change (Voltmer, 2006). Voltmer (2006:1) argues that the media "have a pivotal impact not only on the functioning of other democratic institutions but also on the viability of the democratic process as a whole". In essence, the media is a democratic institution because democracy is believed to prevail in circumstances where public debate and free speech are enabled, and there is no other institution that plays this role compared to the media (Rawnsley, 2005; Voltmer, 2006).

Political communication is currently facing advancement in research on elections at local, regional, and transnational levels (Stromback et al. 2011). Research on political communication during the conduct of parliamentary elections in Europe becomes interesting due to the characteristic of exhibiting a hybrid pattern of voting behaviour (Stromback et al. 2011). More advanced methods and measurements are presented by scholars in the modern political communication environment (Holbert & Bucy, 2011). Political communication underwent several changes in the last few decades, with far-reaching repercussions for democracy and elections. There was never a time when politicians expended stupendous energy and resources communicating with the citizens like in the current democratic era (Brants & Voltmer, 2011). In other words, policy and decision-making are mediating and decentralising

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with more voter engagement than before. This development is what De Beus (2011:19) tagged "audience democracy in postmodern political communication".

Political communication during times of crisis is challenging. For example, during the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic, policymakers must communicate and assuage the fears of the populace, considering the incidence of infections and the death threats. Thus, the magnitude of response must match the scale of the crisis, and there is no organisation with such a capability as the media (Coman et al., 2021). The media, apart from informing the public, has the task of fighting or responding to 'infodemics, translated as fake preventive measures and cures, and conspiracy theories (Coman et al., 2021). The intermittent instability in the United Kingdom's political leadership from 2016 to 2022 is attributed to the interplay of media campaigns and political slogans by parties and politicians, which is seen as one of the turning events of political communication in times of crisis (Wring et al., 2022). During crisis periods like the COVID-19 pandemic, the interaction pattern among media, the public, and policymakers can change. Often times, pandemics and crises like terrorism catch the media and policymakers unaware while the citizens demand explanation from politicians, and the volume of audience instantly increases to seek more information (Van Aeslt, 2022).

Political communication in Nigeria aided and promoted democratic transition within a shorter period of time. In essence, it is argued (Olayiwola, 1991) that the media set the ball rolling for political communication in Nigeria under suppressive regimes of the military, and it is based on the active role of the media that the military was coerced into an unprepared transition to democracy in the 1990s. Other studies (Nwokeafor & Okunoye, 2013; Mustapha & Mustapha, 2017; Mustapha et al., 2019; Adegbola & Gearhart, 2019; Idowu & Odeyemi, 2021) observed that political communication and the role of media are invaluable in fostering democratic stability, politicians and electorates engagements, and public agenda-setting.

An Overview of the Development of Media and Radio Stations in Gombe State

Media stations, particularly radio stations, proliferate rapidly in Gombe State. Gombe State was created on October 1, 1960, by the Abacha Military Administration from the former Bauchi State in Northeast Nigeria. Before the State was created, Gombe Local Government Zone relied on Bauchi Radio Corporation as a source of news and information from the media house.

The first radio station established in Gombe State is state-owned Gombe Media Corporation's 91.9 FM, along with a TV station. The next radio station is Ray Power 93.1 FM. Gombe opened on February 1, 2013, commissioned by Governor Dankwambo. Progress Radio 97.3 FM Gombe opened in February 2016. Amana Radio 98.1 FM. Gombe, which opened in October 2017, is the third privately owned radio station in the State. On January 1, 2019, Jewel FM 103.5 was commissioned as a radio station belonging to the Federal Government of Nigeria under the auspices of the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN). In 15th February 2019, Vision FM 92.7 Gombe opened. The radio station has many branches across the country, particularly in Northern Nigeria, including Vision FM Abuja (92.1), Vision FM Katsina (92.1), Vision FM Kaduna (92.5), Vision FM Kano (92.5), Vision FM Sokoto (92.5), Vision FM Gombe (92.7), and Vision FM Zamfara (92.9) (Gombe State Government, 2023). Kashere FM, belonging to the Federal University of Kashere, Gombe State, was established in 2022 and kicked off its programmes in 2023 (FUK Bulletin, 2023). Thus, Gombe State, being the second-smallest State after Bayelsa, is leading the expansion of media activities. It is among the few Northern states with around seven radio stations.

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This made the state an interesting area of study. Young, but developing rapidly in terms of political communication and the democratisation process, as presented later in the discussion section. What attracts the presence of many media stations and to what extent have they influenced political behaviour in the 2023 General Election can be seen in the discussions section.

The 2023 General Election in Gombe State

In the 2023 General Election, Gombe State has 1,575,794 registered voters. Elections were conducted for the offices of the President and Vice President and National Assembly on February 25, 2023, while those for the gubernatorial and state House of Assembly were held on March 18, 2023, after a postponement of one week (INEC, 2023). The results of the elections for the Presidential, National assembly, and gubernatorial offices for the three major parties, APC, LP, and PDP, are shown in Table 2. Only three parties are considered for analysis here because they are the only ones that exhibited serious national contention at both national and the State level.

Table 2. Result Analysis of the 2023 Presidential, National Assembly, and Gubernatorial Elections in Gombe State

S/No.	Seat	APC	%	LP	%	PDP	%
			Presidential Election				
1.	Presidential Election	146,977	29.23%	26,150	5.20%	319,123	53.47%
			Senatorial Election				
2.	Gombe North	77,948	35.04%	1,383	0.62%	143,155	64.34%
3.	Gombe Central	102,916	72.51%	0	0.00%	37,870	26.68%
4.	Gombe South	36,879	26.81%	2,729	1.98%	97,956	71.21%
			House of Representatives				
5.	Akko	42,902	51.80%	668	0.81%	37,391	456..15%
6.	Balanga/Billiri	28,251	37.97%	0	0.00%	46,146	62,03%
7.	Dukku/Nafada	23,781	40.76%	67	0.11%	33,487	57.39%
8.	Gombe/Kwami/Fun.	54,141	33.85%	0	0.00%	105,799	66.15%
9.	Kaltungo/Shongom	22,983	37.11%	0	0.00%	35,366	57.10%
10.	Yamaltu/Deba	23,209	35.76%	0	0.00%	39,768	61.27%
			Governorship Election				
11.	Gombe State	342,821	56.70%	24	0.00%	233,131	38.56%
			State House of Assembly Election				
12.	24 Constituencies	20	83.33%	0	0.00%	4	16.67%

Source: INEC 2023 Results compiled from personal participant observation The analysis into percentages and groupings is made by the author (2023).

The 2023 General Election in Gombe State indicates that the two dominant parties, APC and PDP, secured all the seats at various elective offices. The third force, LP, failed to show a significant presence in the State.

Discussions

In this section, data generated from various sources is presented and discussed sequentially based on the sources. The first set of data presented here is the survey from the field and the responses of respondents randomly but purposefully selected in the area of study. The total number of selected respondents from four local governments in the three senatorial districts is 380. The questionnaire distribution indicated in Table 3 reveals that a significant turnover is recorded in responses.

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Table 3. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Questionnaire distribution of the respondents					
1.	Responded	Frequency	Not responded	Frequency	Total
	343	90.26%	37	9.74%	380(100%)
Sex of the distribution of the respondents					
2.	Male	Frequency	Female	Frequency	Total
	276	80.47%	67	19.53%	343(100%)
Age distribution of the respondents					
3.	18-30	31-42	43-55	56-66	67-above
	37	69	78	86	73
Educational background of the respondents					
4.	School Cert.	SSCE	NCE/Diploma	Degree/PG	Others/specify
	93	79	33	16	122
Occupational distribution of the respondents					
5.	Civil service	Business	Artisans	Students	Others/specify
	48	62	89	78	66

Source: Fieldwork 2023

The level of responses recorded is highly encouraging. More than 90% of the distributed questionnaires were successfully returned. The sex of the respondents indicates that males are interviewed more than females, perhaps because of accessibility. The age distribution of the respondents shows that significant numbers of respondents from all categories of ages were interviewed. The educational background of the respondents shows a high level of literacy among the interviewed sample. Those who responded others in most cases also have formal education in Islamic schools and Islamic education when they were asked to specify. The occupation of the respondents indicates that around 80% are engaged in one form of occupation or another. Those who responded as others specified that they are mostly farmers. The respondents responded to the questions in different ways based on their opinions, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Respondents' Views on the Role of Media in Political Communication in Gombe State

How often do you listen to radio stations in Gombe?						
1.	Hourly	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	None
	83(24.19%)	172(50.15%)	58(16.91%)	30(8.75%)	0(0.00%)	0(0.00%)
Which radio station do you prefer to listen to in Gombe State?						
2.	GMC	Ray Power	Progress	Amana	Jewel FM	Vision
	27(7.87%)	3(0.87%)	112(32.65%)	68(19.83%)	89(25.95%)	44(12.83%)
Which programme do you prefer to listen to more?						
3.	Current affairs	Political	Religious	News	Sports	Entertainment
	39(11.37%)	101(29.45%)	96(27.99%)	59(17.20%)	14(4.08%)	34(9.91%)
How does political programmes influenced your behaviour in 2023 General Election						
4.	Voters' register	Collect PVC	Determine to vote	Choice of parties	Participate in campaigns	Support parties/candidates
	41(11.95%)	73(21.28%)	87(25.36%)	94(27.41%)	23(6.71%)	25(7.29%)
Which of the political programmes is preferable to you?						
5.	Campaigns	Adverts/jingles	Analysis	Promotions	Debates	Civic/voter education
	39(11.37%)	43(12.54%)	117(34.11%)	23(6.71%)	61(17.78%)	60(17.49%)
In which way do you think radio stations have affected the political process in 2023 General Election in Gombe State?						
6.	Voter turnout	Information	Peaceful conduct	Voting pattern	Following events	Awareness
	91(26.53%)	43(12.54%)	67(19.53%)	69(20.12%)	22(6.41%)	51(14.87%)

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Source: Field Work 2023

The above statistics are unambiguously interpreted as simple percentages. The number of respondents who listened to radio stations frequently in Gombe State, hourly and daily, constitutes nearly 80% of the total respondents, indicating that people give much precedence to listening to radio. On which radio stations are patronised more, the respondents indicate by their responses that they prefer private radio stations and the one owned by the Federal Government, which accounts for 70% of the total respondents. The radio station Kashere was not included because it is just starting and the coverage is not wider within the State than the selected ones here. On which programme the respondents prefer to listen to, their responses indicate that political programmes top the list, followed by religious programmes, news, current affairs, entertainment, and sports as the last. On the question of the role of political programmes in the radio stations and how they influenced the behaviour of the respondents in the political build-up to the 2023 General Election in Gombe State, the respondents chose choice of parties as the top choice with 27.41%, followed by determination to vote (25.36%), collection of PVC (21.28%), voter registration (11.95%), support for parties and candidates (7.29%), and participation in campaigns (6.71%). On the question of which of the political programmes is preferable to the respondents, the responses show that political analysis is top, followed by debates, civic and voter education, ads and jingles, campaigns, and political promotions by politicians and their supporters. On the question of how the radio stations influenced the political process in the 2023 General Election in Gombe State, the respondents answered that voter turnout (26.53%), voting pattern (20.12%), peaceful conduct (19.53%), awareness creation (14.87%), information dissemination (12.54%), and following unfolding political events (6.41%) are the major ways that the radio stations influenced the political process in 2023 sequentially.

Apart from the views expressed by respondents extracted from the questionnaires, the specialised interviews conducted with informants revealed diverse opinions on the role of media, specifically radio stations, in influencing the political process in the 2023 General Election in Gombe State. Some of the critical views are discussed below. However, the recurring information extracted from almost all the informants unanimously is the submission that "radio stations in Gombe State boosted voters' turnout, increased political awareness, influenced voting patterns, promoted peaceful conduct, and expanded voters' views and interests in the Election and politics in the State" (In-depth specialised interviews with informants in categories A, B, C, and D from April to May 2023).

The media influenced voters in Gombe State because: *"We organised our programmes 90% in the local language (Hausa), which is easily comprehensible by all the population, and that has attracted listeners from both rural and urban areas. Our English programmes constitute only 10%, mostly news"* (specialised interview with an informant in category B on April 18, 2023).

Besides, another informant opines that: *"Based on the feedback we received from our audience, people are more interested in political and religious programmes, and we have learned that if properly utilised, our radio programmes can effectively form a public agenda-setting on democracy and good governance"* (specialised interview with an informant in category B on May 9, 2023).

Politicians found radio stations in Gombe State to be more effective tools in conveying their manifestos, programmes, and achievements than even political rallies because: *"By spending an hour on a radio programme, our messages reached all nooks and crannies, and it is influencing how the electorates perceive our programmes and candidature"* (specialised interview with an informant in category A on April 19, 2023).

Another informant from the same category narrates that: "*Political programmes that we sponsored and presented either directly by us or our proxies made an outstanding impact in gaining more votes and support for us from the electorate." We have since discovered that radio is the most suitable platform for reaching the voters"* (specialised interview with an informant in category A on April 23, 2023).

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It was discovered that the presence of media, especially radio stations, in Gombe State changed the life and perception of the Gombe populace positively and permanently. In an interview, an informant reveals: *"Gombe State is lucky to be among the few states in Northern Nigeria to have the presence of numerous radio stations that have been promoting democracy through political awareness and other beautiful enlightening programmes." You can feel the essence in the level of political mobilisation and socialisation among the populace during the recently concluded 2023 General Election"* (specialised interview with an informant in category C on April 12, 2023).

Another informant suggests: *"By introducing political and other current socioeconomic programmes, radio stations in Gombe State succeeded in changing the behaviour of the electorates in the State. Many that had hitherto expressed their dismay not to vote again changed their position after successful and inspiring programmes"* (specialised interview with an informant in category C on April 13, 2023).

The association of radio listeners in the state confirmed that their lives are forever changed because of the inspiration that they are receiving from radio programmes. One of them narrates: *"We have seen how practically radio stations and their programmes altered the perception, activities, engagement, and even political behaviour of our people, particularly in villages where literacy levels are low and information flow is lagging. Through radio programmes, Gombe State dwellers in remote areas can narrate and analyse what is happening globally contemporaneously"* (specialised interview with an informant in category D on May 18, 2023).

Similar to the above view but focusing on the election, an informant expresses: *"What the radio stations in Gombe State did in awakening the populace to register, collect their PVCs, go out to vote, and to vote across candidates irrespective of party affiliation in the 2023 General Election, no organisation has succeeded in doing, not even INEC, NOA, parties, politicians themselves, and NGOs"* (specialised interview with an informant in category D on May 6, 2023).

Thus, the above diverse views of informants disclosed that radio stations have tremendously influenced public opinion, agenda-setting, information dissemination, and particularly the political and electoral process in the 2023 General Election. The practical application of the political communication process is visibly seen here. In addition, apart from the informants, the members of FGD expressed their submissions from different perspectives. Their views are summarised and presented in a chart for easy illustration.

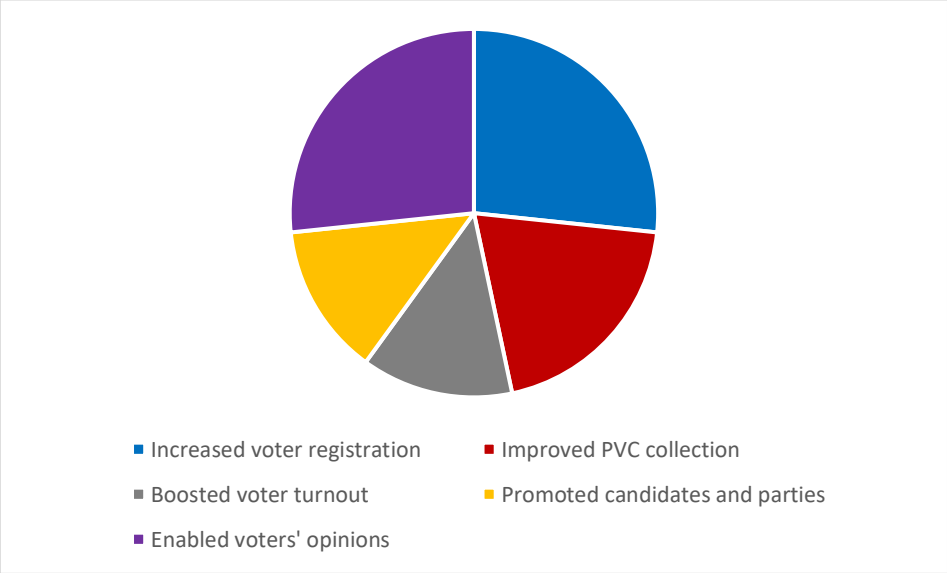


Figure 1. Summary of FGD Views on the Influence of the Media on Political Awareness in the 2023 General Election in Gombe State

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The FGD was held on May 16, 2023, in Gombe, the State capital, with six members representing various groups, unions, and associations, including IPAC, NLC, NURTW, NBA, NUJ, and NULGE. These groups and associations represent both formal workers' unions and non-formal workers' unions. The responses from the group discussions revealed that radio stations played an important role in political awareness in the 2023 General Election in Gombe State in this way: increased voter registration (27%), improved PVC collection (20%), boosted voter turnout (13%), promoted candidates and parties (13%), and enabled voters' opinions (27%). This means the media is practically playing its role in the political communication process, as anticipated.

In the aspect of data generated from personal active participant observation, the researcher is an academic, a public affairs analyst, and an active member of several associations. Most of the programmes to which the researcher was invited within the period of study were political, with a few of them being economic, current affairs, and international issues. At least, around 80% are political, being a Political Scientist teaching at a Federal University. The data were grouped into the following categories, as shown in Table 4. The researcher paid attention to programmes that received feedback more than others, the number of calls received after the programmes, SMS messages, messages through social media, and direct physical contact through visits and programmes.

Table 5. Summary of Perception of the Role of Radio Stations in Political Awareness in Gombe State during the 2023 General Election

S/No.	Programme	Radio	Feedback	Frequency	Period	Impact
1.	Tumbin Giwa	Progress	Agreement	256	July 2022-March 2023	Increased voter turnout
2.	Viewpoints	Progress	Support	109	July 2022-March 2023	Changed voting pattern
3.	Morning Guest	Amana	Appreciation	103	June 2022-March 2023	Audience appreciated the presentation
4.	Kwaryar Kira	Amana	Appreciation	88	June 2022-March 2023	Audience accepted advices on voting
5.	Kukan Kurciya	Jewel FM	Understanding	74	June 2022-March 2023	Audience understood a phenomenon
6.	Birgimar Hankaka	Progress	Appreciation and support	71	July 2022-March 2023	Audience appreciated and agreed on issues discussed
7.	Babbar Magana	Vision FM	Change	29	October 2022-March 2023	Audience accepted to change political view

Source: Field Work 2023

Table 5 indicates that the personal participant observation reveals an experience of the stakeholder in radio operations and activities in Gombe State. Seven programmes were identified, with five of them in Hausa and two in English. The observer received this feedback through phone calls directly during the live programmes, calls after the programmes, SMS, public tagging, and private messages on social media platforms, in addition to physical visits at home and during office hours. Several opinions of the audience were successfully changed, such as voter apathy, unanimous support for one party alone, and money politics.

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Many of the feedbacks unambiguously disclosed that they have resolved to vote now because of the inspiring programmes; they will vote for candidates and not parties due to a lack of ideology; and they will shun money politics.

Many studies (Olayiwola, 1991; Nwokeafor & Okunoye, 2013; Mustapha & Mustapha, 2017; Mustapha et al., 2019; Adegbola & Gearhart, 2019; Idowu & Odeyemi, 2021) have reported that political communication has been influential in changing the attitudes of Nigerians towards democratic governance since the 1990s. The current democratic governance in the Fourth Republic was hard-fought through the influence of the media in the 1990s against the military. In the democratic era, the level of political education was propelled by the media, both electronic and printed, and the citizens were actively engaged by the media in political socialisation, leading to increased participation and following of political events, especially during elections.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that political communication is a great discipline that emerges from the interdisciplinary marriage of different independent fields of human academic endeavour, enriching the discipline and giving it various perspectives and diversities. Communication and democratisation are observed as Siamese twins in this paper, and it is believed that democracy was facilitated in both advanced and emerging countries during mediaeval and modern times by the influence of the media. In Nigeria, the paper concludes that the media is instrumental in democratisation. The study concludes that the presence of media enhances political awareness, as reported in the area of study, Gombe State. The State, one of the smallest in Nigeria, has seven media houses or radio stations, and their presence is observed to have been intricately linked with the level of political socialisation and increased awareness in the State. It is concluded that the activities and role of the media impacted voting behaviour, political engagements, political perceptions, and attitudes of voters in the 2023 General Election in Gombe State.

Based on the inevitable role of media in political awareness in Gombe State, it is recommended in this study that the governments, both Federal and state, intensify the sponsorship of civic-voter education programmes to deepen democratic culture and values in Gombe and beyond. The NGOs are urged to sponsor programmes that will awaken the conscience of the electorates to engage their representatives in post-elections, the policymaking process, and project design and programming. The media houses should continue to provide a level playing field, as they have been doing, for all stakeholders. It is encouraging that the radio stations prioritised local languages, but there is a need to expand to other local languages as Gombe State is a multilingual State with over 20 ethnic groups. It is suggested that more educational programmes should be introduced, and politicians in the State who were successful elected representatives in the recently concluded 2023 General Election should be engaging their constituents at least quarterly to keep in touch with them.

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Author 1 : Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft.
Author 2 : Data Collection, Investigation, Writing – Review and Editing.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to the research, authorship, and publication of this article.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

AI USE DECLARATION

The authors declare that no generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used in the preparation, analysis, or writing of this manuscript.

ETHICAL CLEARANCE

Ethical clearance was not required for this study because the research did not involve human participants, identifiable personal data, or procedures requiring formal ethical approval.

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