

INDEPENDENT TELEVISION (ITV) AND VOTERS' PERCEPTION: IMPACT AND EFFECTIVENESS IN POLITICAL MOBILIZATION DURING THE 2024 EDO STATE GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION

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ABSTRACT

This study examined voters' perception of the impact and effectiveness of Independent Television (ITV) in political mobilization during the 2024 Edo State governorship election. Anchored on the Agenda-Setting Theory, the research aimed to evaluate voters' perception of ITV's electoral coverage, assess the effectiveness of its programming strategies, and identify factors influencing its role in promoting political participation. Using a qualitative research design, data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with 150 registered voters within Benin Metropolis and analyzed descriptively using SPSS. The findings revealed a predominantly negative public perception of ITV's electoral coverage and low effectiveness of its voter mobilization programs. Major constraints identified included declining public trust in traditional media, political interference, inadequate funding, and competition from social media. The study concluded that ITV's strategic effectiveness was hindered by audience skepticism and credibility deficits, reflected in the state's low voter turnout of about 22.5%. It recommended that ITV should strengthen editorial independence, enhance transparency and adopt hybrid digital–broadcast approaches to rebuild public trust and effectively mobilize voters in future elections.

Keywords: Media, Independent Television (ITV), Impact, Effectiveness, Political Mobilization, Voter Perception.

Introduction

The interdependence between media and democracy is foundational to Nigeria's political ecosystem, where the press acts as a crucial watchdog, ensuring transparency and accountability in political decisions. Recognized as the 'fourth estate of the realm', the media plays a central role - scrutinizing government actions, exposing corruption and fostering an informed citizenry capable of participatory democracy through balanced political analysis (Academia.edu, 2025).

Therefore, the pervasive influence of the mass media in shaping political landscapes, particularly within emerging democracies like Nigeria, is undeniable. Mass media, encompassing traditional print, radio, television and modern digital platforms, serves as a vital conduit for disseminating information, news and entertainment to a vast and diverse

audience simultaneously (Akpan & Nnaane, 2011). In Nigeria, this fundamental role is constitutionally mandated, requiring media to act as a watchdog, holding governmental institutions accountable and upholding core societal objectives, as enshrined in Section 22 of the 1999 Constitution (Eke et al. 2024). In Edo State, prominent local media outlets such as Independent Television (ITV) and various radio stations operate as indispensable instruments for political communication, leveraging both visual and auditory elements to reach wide demographics across urban and rural areas, profoundly influencing public opinion and shaping political culture (Ugwu, 2018; Abubakar, Ahmad, & Yushau, 2021).

Within the framework of the Agenda-Setting Theory propounded by McCombs and Shaw (1972), the media may not necessarily tell people what to think, it significantly influences what they think about by emphasizing certain issues, personalities or narratives over others. Through selective coverage, repetition and framing, media outlets such as Independent Television (ITV) can shape the public's perception of political priorities and influence the level of attention citizens give to specific electoral issues. Thus, Agenda-Setting Theory provides a robust framework for assessing ITV's role as both an information source and a political mobilizer within Edo State's political landscape.

Political mobilization, a systematic process of galvanizing citizens to actively participate in political activities, forms the bedrock of democratic engagement. This intricate process involves creating widespread awareness about political issues, fostering a deeper sense of political consciousness, and actively encouraging broad civic engagement (Abubakar, Ahmad & Yushau, 2021). In Edo State, ITV and local radio stations have effectively employed various mechanisms to mobilize voters, particularly those residing in rural areas where historical challenges such as political apathy and lower literacy rates have often prevailed (Ugwu, 2018). These mechanisms include rigorously organized electoral campaigns, targeted public service announcements and interactive programs that encourage voters' participation in the electoral process (Kurfi, Msughter, & Mohamed, 2021).

Ideally, mass media, including broadcast stations like Independent Television and Radio, are meant to be the cornerstone of a healthy democracy. They are expected to serve as a vital link between political candidates and the electorate, informing citizens about party manifestos, policy debates, and candidate profiles. In a perfect scenario, these platforms would provide unbiased, accurate, and comprehensive coverage, empowering citizens to make rational and informed decisions during an election. The media's role is to educate, raise awareness and facilitate political discourse, thereby encouraging active participation and ensuring a credible and fair electoral process. However, the reality of political mobilization in Edo State just as in most Nigerian states often falls short of this ideal. The effectiveness of traditional broadcast media, such as ITV, in mobilizing citizens is often challenged by a variety of factors. These challenges may include issues like political pressure and ownership influence that can lead to biased reporting, the proliferation of misinformation and fake news, and the lack of comprehensive reach, particularly in rural and marginalized communities where a large segment of the population resides. Such obstacles can lead to voter apathy, distrust in the electoral process and citizens being unable to distinguish between genuine information and political propaganda. These challenges inevitably shape voters' perceptions, attitudes and levels of political engagement.

Despite the extensive efforts of Independent Television (ITV) to promote political awareness and encourage voter participation through news bulletins, electoral debates, and civic education programs, the reality of low civic engagement during the 2024 Edo State governorship election underscores a persistent disconnect between media efforts and citizens' behavioral response. Reports by *Yiaga Africa* (2024) and *The Guardian* (2024) revealed that voter turnout in Edo State was among the lowest in recent election cycles—estimated at about 22.5%, a sharp decline compared to earlier polls. This indicates that while ITV's broadcasts may have created awareness, they failed to translate into tangible political participation, particularly among urban youths within Benin Metropolis and residents in semi-urban and rural communities. Such an outcome highlights a critical research gap: the need to examine whether ITV's influence in shaping political perception and mobilization remains effective in a changing media environment where citizens increasingly distrust traditional media sources and migrate toward social and digital alternatives for political information.

2. Objectives of the Study

Based on the foregoing discussion, the study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To evaluate voters' perception of the impact of ITV coverage on electoral process in Edo State.
2. To assess the effectiveness of ITV programming strategies in mobilizing citizens for the 2024 Edo State election.
3. To identify the factors influencing the effectiveness of ITV in promoting political participation and voter engagement during the 2024 election.

3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design, using semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection. Purposive sampling was adopted to select 150 respondents, comprising of registered voters within the Benin Metropolis. This group was chosen because Benin City serves as the political and media hub of Edo State, where Independent Television (ITV) has significant reach and influence. Data were collected through guided interviews focusing on respondents' views regarding ITV's political coverage and campaign-related broadcasts during the 2024 Edo State governorship election. With participants' consent, all interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and systematically coded. The coded responses were then entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for descriptive analysis, which helped in identifying recurring patterns and establishing the frequency of specific themes.

4. Results

Table 1: Voters' Perception of the Impact of ITV/Radio's Coverage on the Electoral Process in Edo State (N = 150)

Items	Mean	SD	Remark
ITV/Radio provided accurate and balanced coverage of political campaigns	2.64	1.12	Negative perception
The coverage helped me better understand party manifestos and candidate profiles	2.78	1.09	Negative perception
ITV/Radio promoted fairness and transparency in the electoral process	2.53	1.15	Negative perception

The coverage influenced my trust and confidence in the electoral process	2.49	1.08	Negative perception
The broadcast of electoral debates and civic programs encouraged participation	2.70	1.10	Negative perception

Source: *Researcher's Compilation, 2025*

Decision Rule: Mean $\geq$ 3.0 = Positive perception; Mean $<$ 3.0 = Negative perception.

Table 1 presents respondents' views on how ITV's political coverage influenced their perception of the 2024 Edo State governorship election. The results reveal an overall negative perception among respondents, as all mean scores fell below the benchmark of 3.0. Specifically, respondents disagreed that ITV provided accurate and balanced coverage of political campaigns (Mean = 2.64, SD = 1.12), and only slightly acknowledged that the coverage helped them understand party manifestos and candidate profiles (Mean = 2.78, SD = 1.09). Similarly, the perception that ITV promoted fairness and transparency in the electoral process was weak (Mean = 2.53, SD = 1.15). Moreover, the media's influence on trust and confidence in the electoral process was rated low (Mean = 2.49, SD = 1.08), indicating that respondents viewed ITV/Radio's role as insufficient in fostering electoral credibility. Although the broadcast of electoral debates and civic programs was rated slightly higher (Mean = 2.70, SD = 1.10), it still fell below the 3.0 threshold, showing that such programs did not significantly enhance voter engagement or perception of fairness.

Table 2: Effectiveness of ITV/Radio's Programming Strategies in Mobilizing Citizens for the 2024 Edo State Governorship Election (N = 150)

Items	Mean	SD	Remark
ITV/Radio's voter education programs	2.84	1.07	Less effective
Interactive talk shows	2.91	1.12	Less effective
Use of election-related jingles and announcements	2.76	1.09	Less effective
Use of local languages	2.63	1.13	Less effective
Collaboration with INEC and civic groups	2.58	1.16	Less effective

Source: *Researcher's Compilation, 2025*

Decision Rule: Mean $\geq$ 3.0 = More effective; Mean $<$ 3.0 = Less effective.

Table 2 reveals that respondents perceived ITV's programming strategies as less effective in mobilizing citizens for the 2024 Edo State Governorship election, with all mean scores falling below the decision benchmark of 3.0. Although voter education programs (mean = 2.84) and interactive talk shows (mean = 2.91) moderately raised awareness and discussion, other strategies—such as election jingles, local language broadcasts, and collaborations with INEC—were weak and lacked sufficient impact. Overall, the findings suggest that while ITV made efforts to engage voters, its programming was not robust enough to drive strong political participation or widespread mobilization.

Table 3: Factors Influencing the Effectiveness of ITV/Radio in Promoting Political Participation and Voter Engagement during the 2024 Edo State Election (N = 150)

Items	Mean	SD	Remark
Low public trust and negative perception in traditional media among urban youth	3.42	1.08	Major factor
Limited funding and resource constraints reduce program quality	3.36	1.11	Major factor
Competition from social media platforms reduces audience attention	3.31	1.09	Major factor
Political interference and ownership bias affect ITV/Radio's neutrality	3.25	1.10	Major factor
Misinformation and fake news from other sources undermine ITV/Radio's credibility	3.22	1.09	Major factor

Source: *Researcher's Compilation, 2025*

Decision Rule: Mean ≥ 3.0 = Major factor; Mean < 3.0 = Minor factor.

The analysis of Table 3 shows that several interrelated factors significantly influenced the effectiveness of ITV in promoting political participation and voter engagement during the 2024 Edo State Governorship Election. With all the mean scores above the decision benchmark of 3.0, the findings reveal that low public trust and negative perception of traditional media among urban youth (Mean = 3.42) emerged as the most critical factor, indicating a generational shift in media consumption and skepticism toward conventional broadcast outlets. Other notable factors include limited funding and resource constraints (Mean = 3.36), which affected program quality and consistency, as well as competition from social media platforms (Mean = 3.31), which diverted audience attention away from traditional broadcast content. Additionally, political interference and ownership bias (Mean = 3.25) and the spread of misinformation and fake news (Mean = 3.22) further undermined the credibility and neutrality of ITV.

5. Discussion of Findings

The study's results show a predominantly negative public perception of ITV's election coverage (Table 1) and a judgment that ITV's programming strategies were less effective in mobilizing citizens (Table 2). At the same time, respondents identified clear structural and audience-related constraints — notably low trust among urban youth, funding shortfalls, competition from social media, political/ownership interference, and widespread misinformation — as major factors limiting ITV's effectiveness (Table 3). These findings fit a growing body of work showing that audience trust is a decisive mediator between media activity and civic action: where trust is weak, even well-designed civic programs have limited persuasive power (Chatham House, 2023).

The practical effect of that trust/credibility gap is visible in the 2024 Edo governorship context. Independent tallies and election observers estimated low overall turnout for the September 21, 2024 poll — Yiaga Africa's analysis placed turnout around 22–24% ($\approx 22.5\%$) — showing weak mass mobilization across the state (Yiaga Africa, 2024). When a major urban constituency such as Benin Metropolis exhibits negative perceptions of local broadcasters, the capacity of those broadcasters to convert awareness into turnout is constrained; citizens

exposed to ITV programming may still distrust the source and therefore remain apathetic or refrain from voting.

Comparative empirical evidence underscores this mechanism. Studies of INEC-sponsored media campaigns have shown that trusted, neutral messaging can raise awareness and turnout when audiences view the messages as credible; conversely, partisan or distrusted outlets produce muted mobilization effects (e.g., evaluations of INEC media interventions and other Nigerian case studies). Thus, ITV's moderate/weak programming effects revealed in the study are consistent with broader evidence that message credibility seen from the viewpoint of the voters' perception — not just message presence — drives turnout (Umukoro & Ogwezi, 2022).

Therefore, ITV's impact and strategic effectiveness in mobilizing voters during the 2024 Edo State governorship election were largely hampered by voters' negative perception of its credibility, neutrality, and relevance, particularly among urban audiences. The findings revealed that skepticism toward traditional media, especially among younger and more urbanized voters in Benin Metropolis, weakened the persuasive power of ITV's voter education and campaign programs. Despite notable efforts through talk shows, jingles, and election debates, the station's ability to influence political engagement was undermined by widespread distrust, political interference, limited resources, and competition from social media platforms offering alternative narratives.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Media credibility is the strongest predictor of civic response, and this study reaffirmed that reality in the context of the 2024 Edo State governorship election. The research assessed voters' perception of the impact and effectiveness of Independent Television (ITV) in political mobilization, focusing on Benin Metropolis as the state's media hub. Findings revealed that voters held a predominantly negative perception of ITV's electoral coverage, viewing it as biased, unbalanced, and insufficiently transparent. Similarly, ITV's programming strategies — including voter education, talk shows and civic jingles — were perceived as less effective in mobilizing citizens to participate in the election. Factors such as declining trust in traditional media, limited funding, political interference, competition from social media, and misinformation further undermined the station's effectiveness. The low voter turnout of about 22.5% (Yiaga Africa, 2024) in the 2024 election reflects how public distrust in media credibility translated into weak civic engagement and political apathy.

It is on this bases that the following recommendations are given:

1. ITV/Radio should institutionalize editorial independence by adopting transparent reporting standards, professional ethics training and stronger fact-checking mechanisms to rebuild public trust.
2. ITV/Radio should establish transparent editorial policies and fact-checking mechanisms to rebuild audience trust, ensuring impartial coverage of political events.
3. To engage urban youth, ITV should adopt hybrid broadcast-digital outreach, using interactive online content to complement traditional radio and TV programs.

Positive voters' perception remains the lifeblood of effective political communication. For ITV and similar broadcasters, overcoming partisanship and strengthening audience trust are

essential to restoring the media's democratic role as a true agent of civic mobilization and public enlightenment in Edo State and beyond.

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