

Public and Private Media Reportage of Free and Fair Elections: Views of Media Audience in Anambra State, Nigeria.

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Abstract

Free and fair election is a cherished feature, a universally acceptable and an intrinsically inseparable characteristic of democracy. Reporting election in unbiased, truthful and factual terms is an important role of the press globally. However, at present, in most African countries that have embraced democracy, such as Nigeria, this feature has not been attained. This comparative study of government and private owned media reportage of election in Nigeria aimed at ascertaining the section of the media that pay more attention to issues of free and fair polls. The survey utilised questionnaire to collect data from 300 media audiences in triangulation with interview of select media professionals in Anambra State. It adopted purposive sampling procedure. The paper was anchored on the Social Responsibility and the Agenda-setting theories of mass communication. The study used the percentage method in data analysis. Findings of the study show, among others that privately owned media report free and fair elections, no matter who it favours while government owned media rarely report such issues except where such report favours the government. Based on the findings, the paper recommended that the media owned by government should be more proactive in reporting electoral fairness at all times.

Keywords: Free, Fair, Elections, Nigeria, Reporting, Media, Government, Private, Audience and Views.

1. Introduction and Justification for the study

One of the chief cornerstones on which viable democracy stands is the conduct of regular, free and fair elections. Election is a formal decision-making process by which a population chooses an individual to hold public office (Encyclopedia Britannica, Online). Election and democracy are inseparable; often election is the yardstick for measuring a nation's democracy. A country's democracy is adjudged viable or strong among other criteria, when electoral issues are carried out in objective and transparent manner. Elections are meaningfully democratic if they are free, fair, participatory, competitive, and legitimate (Oromarehake, 2013, p. 21).

Free and fair elections are so important that they play a critical role in political transitions by advancing democratisation and encouraging political liberalisation – helping to promote peaceful democratic political transformation that lead to increased stability and prosperity (USAID, 2013). The mass media are an important partner in the process of democratisation. They perform crucial functions in democratic elections by reporting political parties, candidates, the electoral body, electioneering campaigns, electoral laws, guidelines, voters' registration, voter education, and all other facets of the electoral process. Through their agenda-setting function, the mass media give prominence to these issues, thereby encouraging wider participation and sustenance of voter interest in the process. The mass media also set agenda of free and fair elections by the frequency and quality of reportage given to such issues, among others. The media, therefore, owe the society a responsibility not only to support electoral fairness at all times but also to champion it by throwing their weight behind it. This is not yet the case in most African democracies, particularly Nigeria.

Media ownership in Nigeria generally toes two lines; the government and the privately owned media. Newspapers, television and radio (in the main) owned by the government, whether state or federal, form the government media while similar media channels (including, and importantly too, magazine) owned by private individuals or organisations constitute the private media. These two sections of the media provide the Nigerian people information on virtually all issues especially election and other democratic processes. The international media also operate in Nigeria and are used by most people to measure the accuracy of reports given by the local media.

There has always been disagreement between the reports of the two sections of the local media in Nigeria regarding the free and fair conduct of almost all elections held in the country in recent times. Whereas one section of the media would always claim that because an election is violent-free or peaceful, it is therefore free and fair; the other section would insist that there has been manipulation, rigging and other forms of electoral fraud which combine to make an election undemocratic. The mere fact that an election is peaceful does not mean that it is free and fair. Free and fair election entails that the processes leading to and including the conduct of the election proper should be transparently open and devoid of any form of electoral fraud. Election reports must

necessarily be seen in this light for such an election report to be said to be free and fair. It is against this backdrop that the study investigated free and fair elections reporting in Nigeria by government and privately owned media drawing views from media audience in Anambra State, Nigeria.

1.1 Conceptual Delineation

- Election: An election refers to the making of decision by a certain population of people to choose an individual to hold a public office. In Nigeria, election could be national -presidential, senatorial and house of representative; state - gubernatorial, and state legislative elections; and local government - chairmanship, and councillorship elections.
- Mass Media: These refer to the modern communication channels of mass information dissemination such as newspapers magazines, radio and television which are used to communicate messages to mass audience. In Nigeria, the mass media of communication are owned by either government – federal or state, and private individuals and/or organisations.
- Media Audience: Media audience refers to the recipients of media messages; those for whom the content of the mass media are meant. In this study media audiences in Anambra State are the focus.
- Election Reporting: This study views election reporting as the extent or degree to which issues concerning election are observed, analysed, discussed and reported in the mass media.
- Free and Fair Election: This study takes free and fair elections to mean strict adherence to election laws – the Constitution and the Electoral Act, as well as conformity with the universal laid down rules and regulations guiding the conduct of elections.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were to:

- i. Find out how regular Nigerian media (generally) report issues bordering on free and fair elections.
- ii. Ascertain the extent to which government owned media report matters of free and fair elections.
- iii. Assess when government owned media may likely report electoral fairness.
- iv. Ascertain how regular the privately owned media in Nigeria provide report on free and fair elections.
- v. Assess when the privately owned media report matters bordering on free and fair elections.

1.3 Research Questions

The following research questions were posed to guide the conduct of the study:

- i. How regular do Nigerian media (generally) report issues concerning free and fair elections?
- ii. To what extent do government owned media report matters of free and fair election?
- iii. When would government owned media likely report electoral fairness in Nigeria?
- iv. How regular do privately owned media in Nigeria provide report on free and fair elections?
- v. When would the privately owned media in Nigeria report matters concerning free and fair elections?

2.0 Theoretical Underpinning

Theories are important in any academic endeavour because they lend themselves to various texts and analysis such that the phenomenon central to the research get explained, clarified and even predicted as the case maybe (Edegoh and Asemah, 2013, p. 176). Therefore, for better understanding of the study, two communication theories were chosen to provide the needed framework, namely: the Social responsibility and Agenda-setting theories.

The social responsibility media theory was propounded by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm in 1963. The theory which owes its origin to the 1949 Hutchins Commission on Freedom of the Press holds that freedom carries concomitant obligations, and the press, which enjoys a privileged position under the government, is obliged to be responsible to for society carrying out certain essential functions of mass communication (Anaeto, Onabajo and Osifeso, 2008, pp. 57-58). According to McQuail (1987), cited in Ojobor (2002), the main principles of the Social responsibility theory are as follows:

1. That media should accept and fulfill certain obligations to society.

2. That, through professional standards of informativeness - truth, accuracy, objectivity and balance, these obligations can be met.
3. That media should regulate itself within the framework of the law and established institutions to be able to carry out its responsibilities.
4. That whatever might lead to crime, violence, civil disorder or offence to minority groups, should be avoided by the media.
5. That the media should reflect its society's plurality, giving access to various points of view and granting all the right to reply.
6. Based on the principle in (1), the society has the right to expect high standards of performance from the media. Intervention can only be justified to secure public good.
7. Accountability of media professional should be to the society, employers and market.
Anaeto et al (2008, p. 58) aver that the Social responsibility theory postulates five specific functions for the press, namely:
 1. To serve the political system by making information, discussion and consideration of public affairs generally accessible;
 2. To inform the public to enable it take self-determined action;
 3. To protect the rights of the individuals by acting as watchdog over the government;
 4. To serve the economic system, for instance by bringing together buyers and sellers through the medium of advertising; and
 5. To preserve financial autonomy in order not to become dependent on special interests and influences.

The Social responsibility theory views the media as the “eyes”, the “mouth piece” and the “watchdog” of society which play a peculiar role in getting rid of social evils, educating people, criticizing government policies and exposing wrong doings in the society, and holds that the media should write and speak without any form of censorship, and should display high level of truth, objectivity, accuracy and balanced information dissemination in the society: thus, placing an irrevocable premium on the media to be perpetually accountable to the audience as their continual obligation to the society (Kajo, 2012, p. 56). Therefore, the relevance of the Social responsibility media theory to this study is that both share a common opinion and ideology on the role of the media, particularly during elections.

Agenda-setting theory of the mass media was formulated by Maxwell McCombs and Donald L. Shaw in 1972/1973. The major assumption of the theory is that the media set agenda for the public to follow. The theory holds that most of the pictures we store in our heads, most of the things we think or worry about, most of the issues we discuss, are based on what we have read, listened to or watched in different mass media. The media make us to think about certain issues: they make us to think that certain issues are more important than others in our society. Thus, the agenda setting theory of the mass media proposes that public agenda or what kind of things people talk, think or worry about is powerfully shaped and directed by what the media choose to publicise. Also, it has been successfully argued that the agenda setting theory “is good at explaining why people with similar media exposure place importance on the same issues. Although different people may feel differently about the issue at hand, most people feel the same issues are important” (Anaeto, et al 2008, p. 90).

The theory is relevant to the study at hand in that the mass media set political and electoral agenda for the public to follow by the number of times an issue is reported, by using headline and other picture display strategies to play up a report, and by providing reports that give room for “points and counterpoints” (Anaeto et al 2008, p. 89).

2.1 Review of Literature

Election is an important hallmark of enthroning and sustaining democracy in societies like ours. Umechukwu (2004, p. 32), cited in Edegoh, Ezebuenyi and Asemah (2013, p. 378) asserts that “election is paramount and highly significant in any given society”. Edegoh et al (2013, p. 378) aver that election provides the electorates the opportunity to vote their representative into office for a particular length of time. Gbenga (2003, p. 129) sees election as a mechanism which permits the largest possible part of a population to influence major decisions by choosing among contenders for political office. He further asserts that election performs the important functions of leadership selection; it enables the electorates to indicate, and by implication, underscore their preference of a particular leader or leaders who they consider worthier than others for a specified public office.

According to Rajasingham (2005), free, fair and credible elections depend on three critical factors, namely: (1) an enabling legislative framework; (2) the impartial and neutral practices of election administrators, the media and the forces that maintain law and order; and (3) acceptance of the competitive electoral process by all the political forces in the country. The writer argues that free and fair elections should mean universal and equal access to the electoral process and to ballots which are secret and free. He maintains that free and fair elections require an absence of fraud and intimidation and that the votes are translated fairly into legislative seats in a transparent manner and in accordance with the law, the Constitution and the Electoral Act; and must be in conformity with the universal laid down rules and regulations guiding the conduct of elections.

Election is a process, involving different and important stages. This point has been made more lucid by Rajasingham (2005) who observes that free and fair election is an “umbrella concept” and organising of free and fair election is truly a part of continuum – a process. The conduct of free and fair election requires that all the stages involved should be carried out by the concerned stakeholders in transparent and fair manner, and as stipulated by law. Electoral transparency, openness and fairness are necessary to guarantee stability, peace, understanding and sustenance of interest in the process as well as to avoid suspicion and civil strife (Zulu, 2007). Free and fair election is a necessary precondition for determining the legitimacy of a government. Fraudulent poll usually produces illegitimate government.

In order to ensure a credible election, the following conditions/factors identified by Chris (2013) should be in place:

- The creditability of election begins with various political parties; the outcome of party primaries goes a long way to determine the choice of voters. There is therefore, the need for proper internal democracy during party primaries because the electorates can only make their choice from the list of successful party flag-bearers.
- Also, for an election to be adjusted as foolproof, the process of registering voters for the particular election must be done in accordance with guiding rules and regulations; only eligible voters should be registered, under aged registration should be avoided, and multiple registration should not be allowed.
- To ensure the success of an election, it is paramount to educate the electorates, political parties, security agencies and all other stakeholders in the election process, on the process of the conduct of an election, what is expected of them, their rights and privileges during the election so that they know what to do, how to do and what not to do.
- Encouragement of people through the use of the mass media and public orientation organs of government to come out in large numbers to vote during election and to participate fully in the electoral process is a necessarily precondition for the conduct of credible election.
- Proper planning and analysis of the gamut of activities going on from the beginning to the end is vital. All aspects in the organisation of an election such as the recruitment and training of non-party affiliated polling officials, the early arrival of electoral materials to various states and, ultimately the polling units, how to convey polling officials, and the election materials to and from polling stations, proper remuneration of election officials, etc, are so sacrosanct that none should be overlooked.
- Also those that serve as watchdogs during electoral processes such as the fourth estate of the realm and “the security agencies should awake to their responsibilities during elections, be properly mobilised, and they should not take sides in the discharge of their duties.
- In addition, a free and fair election should be simple, transparent, it must respect the secrecy of the ballot, it must be based on good, acceptable and enforceable law, it must respect human rights, it must respect the right of appeal, it must encourage the existence of genuine opposition parties, it must recognise the social and political circumstances of the people it serves, and its outcome must be acceptable to the people.

The benefits of fair elections have been identified by Common Cause (n.d). According to the source, the benefits of fair elections are:

- Makes candidates and elected officials accountable only to the public interest, rather than powerful special interests.
- Saves taxpayer dollars by reducing inappropriate giveaways to campaign contributors.
- Makes elections fair by leveling the playing field for candidates.
- Allows politicians to spend less time fundraising, so they can spend more time addressing national priorities.
- Gives all citizens, regardless of wealth, a fair shot to be heard and participate in every step of the democratic process.
- Reinvigorates democracy by helping to reengage voters and increase voter turnout.

As enviable as the benefit and goal of free and fair elections is, its realisation has continued to be elusive to most countries in Africa, particularly, Nigeria. The reasons why the conduct of fair polls has not been attained in Nigeria are many. Christ (2013) identifies the major factors as follows:

i. Power of incumbency

The power of incumbency in Nigeria still remains a huge factor in the determination of election outcomes. All state's apparatus, particularly the treasury, are employed to ensure the return of the incumbent government. If the incumbent is to vacate office after spending the maximum term, he/she will do everything within his power to ensure the election of the candidate on the platform of his/her political party, doing this by using the media, the security agencies and all other resources at his/her disposal.

ii. Godfatherism

The activities of the so called godfathers are a major cause of flaws in Nigeria's elections. In Nigerian political environment, *godfatherism* exists although its influence seems to be declining in recent elections. Some *godsons* who successfully clinch to power through the mechanization of a godfather had been converted to mere waste pipes, through which state resources were siphoned to service the interest of their mentors. The scenario portrays a situation where the successful *god children* become the established agents of the *godfather* for the purpose of public administration, as directed by the political master (Ezeh, Chukwuma & Enwereuzo, 2015). The godfathers are seen as first citizens before the governor in the state they take dominance. Godfathers impose candidates during party primaries, exterminate opposing elements within and outside their political party that might prevent the assumption to power of their godson, and they disrupt the voting process by hiring hoodlums to perform acts of violence in the aim of achieving their goal of controlling power and receiving huge financial return on their investment.

iii. Illiteracy

Illiteracy is a major reason why free and fair election remains elusive in Nigeria. Illiteracy rate is still very high in the country, particularly in the North. Most of the illiterates are also ignorant of the electoral process. This development results in a flock of electorates who are not aware of their rights and privileges.

iv. Huge salaries and other incentives

Due to huge salaries and other incentives attached with both executive and legislative elective offices in Nigeria, those who find their way into these public positions find it very difficult to relinquish power as they become used to the financial rewards and other privileges that come with their office.

v. Activities of rich elites

There exist some network and connections of rich elites who are the movers and shakers of the economy, those who run the financial wheel and means of production in Nigeria and the end of a particular regime or the ousting of a political party means the end of their influence in government, therefore they do all within their power to ensure that their link in government is maintained.

vi. Corruption

Nigeria has not been able to have a foolproof election due to corrupt nature of some Nigerians, particularly the highly placed. Systemic corruption has for a very long time find its way into all areas of Nigeria's political and socio economic systems. This makes it possible for an election official to collect money from a political party, candidate or their agents for the purpose of altering the outcome of an election. In the same vein, voters are given money in exchange for their votes. In some cases, the election officials or the voters themselves demand for this bribe. This results in criminal negation of the whole electoral process.

vii. Poverty

The high rate of wide spread poverty in Nigeria is another problem confronting the conduct of free and fair election. Majority of the people are so poor that a bribe of N200 naira can make them sell their vote. This level of tormenting poverty makes it easy for politicians to buy their way into public offices.

viii. Unemployment

Another major problem militating against the conduct of free and fair poll in Nigeria is the level of unemployment in the land. More than 80% of Nigerian youths are not employed. The level of joblessness and youths restiveness keep growing on daily basis in Nigeria; numerous graduates are released on yearly basis into the already saturated labour market without any glimmer of hope of getting a job, and because these youths are idle, hungry and without hope, they could be mobilised by unscrupulous politicians for their selfish interest.

Reporting of news is perhaps the most important traditional function of the mass media. UCLA (2014) defines news reporting as live filming or photography and transmission (with or without audio recording) as “active” or “breaking” news, by a qualified news reporting service. It is a story contained in a newspaper, magazine or on radio or television that is about something that happened or that gives information about what has happened (Merriam – Webster, (2014). In most societies, the vast majority of people depend on the media for information. Democracy requires that citizens be adequately informed so as to enable them make educated voting choices. For foolproof election reporting, two types of reporting are important, namely: objective (descriptive) reporting and interpretative (investigative) reporting. Objective journalism places a premium on the press to simply report the facts. Interpretative reporting, on the other hand, encourages interpretation and analysis of news events in addition to presentation of facts.

Ownership of mass media in Nigeria takes two forms, namely: the government owned media (also known as public media) and the privately owned media. These two sections of the media in Nigeria are involved in reporting election and electoral issues. The form/pattern of their report, particularly as it concerns free and fair election forms the thrust of this study.

3.0 Method

The study adopted the survey research method. The survey research method focuses on people, the vital facts of people; their belief, opinion, attitude, motivation, and behaviour. The population of the study was made up of all media audiences in Anambra State. The sample size for the study was 300 respondents purposively selected from Awka, Onitsha and Nnewi (all in Anambra State). The choice of 300 respondents as the sample size for the study was informed by the principle set forth by Comrey and Lee (1992), cited in Edegoh, Ezeh and Samson (2015, p.65) that “one guideline recommended for multivariate studies is as follows: 50 = very poor; 100 = poor; 200 = fair; 300 = good; 500 = very good; and 1000 = excellent. Further justification for the use of 300 participants in the study was anchored on the submission of Nwana (1981), cited in Edegoh, Ezeh and Samson (2015, p. 65) that “if the population is a few hundreds, a 40% or more sample will do; if many hundreds, a 20% sample will do; if a few thousands, a 10% sample will do; and if several thousands, a 5% sample or less will do”. The reason for using purposive sampling technique was to ensure that participants in the study meet certain criteria considered by the researchers as prerequisites for inclusion into the study. Also, ten media practitioners (also in Anambra State) were interviewed.

The study employed the questionnaire as instrument of data collection. The questionnaire had two sections; section A was on respondents’ demographic information and section B was designed to answer the research questions. The questionnaire was used because of its capacity to facilitate the collection of large amount of data in a relatively short period of time. Data collected were analysed using the percentage method and frequency tables.

4.0 Results

Table 1: Return rate of questionnaire

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Returned and found usable	295	98
Not usable	5	2
Not returned	Nil	0
Total	300	100

Data gathered yield 98% (n = 245) return rate while the mortality rate was 2% (n = 5). The return rate is higher than the mortality rate. The mortality rate of 2% does not affect the study because it is insignificant compared with the return rate of 98%. Thus, the copies were considered good enough to represent the population. The presentation and analysis of data obtained from the questionnaire was based on the two hundred and nine-five (295) copies that were returned and found usable. Similarly, the opinion of the media professionals interviewed form part of the data presentation and analysis.

Table 2: Respondents' demographic characteristics

Response/Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	202	68
Female	93	32
Total	295	100
Age		
21 – 30 years	90	30.5
31 – 40 years	152	51.5
41 years and above	53	18
Total	295	100
Marital Status		
Married	235	80
Single	60	20
Total	295	100
Occupation		
Students	48	16
Traders	85	29
Civil Servants	112	38
Unemployed	30	10
Others	20	7
Total	295	100
Academic attainment		
Secondary school	89	30
Tertiary education	178	60
Post degree education	28	10
Total	295	100

Table 2 on demographic characteristics of the respondents shows that 68% (n = 202) of the respondents were male while 32% (n = 93) were female. Male respondents were more than female respondents because male respondents seemed to have knowledge of free and fair elections more than their female counterparts. Also out of the ten media professionals interviewed, seven were male and three were female. The age characteristics of the respondents indicates that about 30% of them (n = 90) were between the ages of 21 – 30 years, those whose age bracket ranged from 31 – 40 years were about 51% (n = 152), while the age bracket 41 years and above, had 18 percent (n = 53) of the respondents. The age characteristics of the 10 media professionals interviewed shows that five of them were 31 – 40 years while five were 41 years and above. On the marital status of the respondents, data reveals that majority of them were married (80%, or n = 235), and 20% (n = 60) were single. Similarly, all the media professionals interviewed were married, none of them was single.

Occupational distribution of the respondents shows that majority of them were civil servants and traders (n = 112 or 38%, and n = 85 or 29% respectively). However, students account for 16% (n = 48), the unemployed constitutes 10% (n = 30) while “others” such as artisans and apprentices formed 7% (n = 20). Data generated through interview reveal that five of the media professionals were employed by the privately owned media while the remaining five were engaged by the public or government owned media.

On the academic attainment of the respondents, the majority obtained tertiary educational training (60%, n = 178); those with secondary school educational training were 30% (n = 89), and those who had post degree education (masters degree and above), were 10% (n = 28). Similarly, eight of the media professionals had first degree or its equivalent, while two of them were trained beyond first degree.

Research Question One

How regular do Nigerian media (generally) report issues bordering on free and fair elections?

Table 3: Report of free and fair election issues

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very regular	60	20
Regular	151	51
Seldom	49	17
Never	20	7
Don't know	15	5
Total	295	100

Table 3 contains data on how regular Nigerian mass media report issues of free and fair elections. As could be gleaned from the table, the majority of the respondents were of the opinion that the media in Nigeria

report electoral fairness regularly (51%, n = 151), and very regularly (20%, n = 60). However, 17% of the respondents (n = 49) felt that the media seldom report issues concerning free and fair election, 7% (n = 20) of the respondents asserted that the media in Nigeria do not carry report on free and fair elections, and 5% (n = 15) returned the “don’t know” verdict. The import of data on research question one is that the mass media in Nigeria report issues of free and fair election on regular basis. This position is also maintained by eight out of the ten media professionals interviewed.

Research Question Two

To what extent do government owned media report matters of free and fair election in Nigeria?

Table 4: Extent of report of free and fair elections by government media

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Always	30	10
Sometimes	148	50
Never	117	40
Total	295	100

Table 4 contains data obtained to determine the extent of report of free and fair election by government owned media in Nigeria. As indicated in the table, 50% of the respondents (n = 148) chose the option “sometimes” to reflect the extent of reporting of free and fair elections in public/government media, 10% (n = 30) chose the option “always”. However, 40% (n = 117) chose the option “never”. Also, seven media professionals asserted that government owned media in Nigeria carry report on free and fair elections but not all the time. The implication of data on research question two is that government media in Nigeria report electoral fairness but not regularly.

Research Question Three

When would government owned media likely report electoral fairness in Nigeria?

Table 5: Government owned media report of electoral fairness

Response	Frequency	Percentage
At all times	53	18
When such report favours the government	210	71
Don’t know	32	11
Total	295	100

On research question three, data generated show that majority of the respondents (71% or n = 210) said that government media would carry report on electoral fairness when it favours the government. However, 18% (n = 53) of the respondents disagreed, asserting that government media would carry such report at all times, and 11% (n = 32) chose the “don’t know” response option. Similarly, data from interview of media professionals reflect that seven of the professionals supported that government media in Nigeria report issues of electoral fairness when such report favours the ruling party. The deduction that could be made based on data on research question three is that government owned media in Nigeria report electoral fairness when such report is in favour of the government.

Research Question Four

How regular do privately owned media in Nigeria provide report on free and fair election?

Table 6: Extent of reporting of free and fair elections by the private media

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Always	208	71
Sometimes	50	20
Never	27	9
Total	295	100

Data on research question four is on how regular privately owned media provide report on free and fair elections. Two hundred and eight respondents, representing 71% asserted that the privately owned media report on free and fair election always; 60 respondents, representing 20% said that the private media do so sometimes; and 27 respondents, representing 9% said that privately owned media never provide such report. Similarly, data from the interview indicate that majority of the media professionals were in support that privately owned media report free and fair elections always.

Research Question Five

When would privately owned media in Nigeria report matters bordering on free and fair elections?

Table 7: Privately owned media report of electoral fairness

Response	Frequency	Percentage
At all times	207	70
Sometimes	56	19
Don't know	32	11
Total	295	100

Data on research question five show that majority of the respondents (n = 207 or 70%) asserted that the privately owned media report free and fair election at all times. However, 56 respondents (19%), and 32 respondents (11%) chose the response options “sometimes” and “don't know” respectively. Also, data from the interview schedule support that privately owned media report free and fair elections always. Data on research question five bears evidence that privately owned media in Nigeria report electoral fairness at all times.

4.1 Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study are both revealing and interesting. First and foremost, the study found that the mass media in Nigeria generally provide report on free and fair election. The media do so through two main media report approaches – objective and investigative technique. The broadcast media of television and radio usually adopt objective approach while the print media or magazine (in the main) and newspaper employ investigative technique. The mass media provide report on electoral fairness whenever election is held in Nigeria; whether federal, state or local government election. In providing report on electoral fairness the media in Nigeria focus on the electoral body (Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC), the political parties – their conventions, party primaries, etc, the law enforcement agents, particularly the police, electioneering campaigns, among others.

Findings of the study also show that government owned media do report electoral fairness but not as regularly as the privately owned media. The reason for this, according to many respondents, borders on government censorship of its media and other forms of state control of the media. Another militating factor against free reportage of electoral fairness by the media owned by government, according to the media professionals, is that electoral fraud is usually committed by the incumbent government and its agents, and reporting of such issues would constitute an embarrassment to the government.

Findings of the study further reveal that government owned media report about free and fair election when such report favours the government. Most often, it is the opposition party that agitates for electoral transparency as a way to ensure political level playing ground so as to compete favourably with the party in power but the incumbent, not willing to be ousted, uses every state apparatus at its disposal including the media to muzzle the opposition. Government owned media therefore provide report that is favourable to the government, including election reports, particularly the media owned by the various state governments in Nigeria.

Findings of the study indicate that privately owned media are more forthright in reporting matters of electoral fairness. The reasons adduced to this development include that private media are not as routinely censored as the public media, and that private media need to display some level of professionalism in their reports, especially during elections, for majority of the people to accept and patronise them, including opposition parties, which most often, are not allowed to use the government media, especially the media owned by state governments.

Finally, findings of the study indicate that privately owned media in Nigeria carry reports on free and fair election at all times, particularly in an election period. The current “One Man, One Vote” political philosophy in Nigeria is being championed by the privately owned media across the country.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

This study on public and private media reportage of free and fair elections in Nigeria was carried out to ascertain the section of the media that pay more attention to issues of free and fair elections. The two media sections (groups) studied were government and privately owned media. From the findings of the study, it was evident that privately owned media perform better than the public media in reporting electoral fairness. We therefore, conclude that privately owned media pay more attention to issues of free and fair elections in Nigeria and that they do so regularly no matter who the report favours.

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, we made the following recommendations:

- i. Government owned media should be more proactive in handling electoral reports in Nigeria, and should report on free and fair elections at all times no matter who such report favours.
- ii. Government should allow public owned media to be run professionally so that they should emphasise fairness in their report of elections in the country.

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