



The Internet, Ethnic Politics and Electoral Outcomes in Nigeria

Agagbo , Johnson Ikporho & Osaro Alale Obari (PhD)

**Department of Political and Administrative Studies
Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt, Nigeria
Johnson_aga@yahoo.com**

ABSTRACT

The revolution with which the internet used to penetrate the global political scene was not only phenomenal but also transformative in the model of sensitization and mobilization of people towards democracy. However, while the internet has played increasing roles in politicking and electioneering, there is also the concern that in ethnically fragmented and fractured societies, the use of the internet can be instrumented to reinforce ethnic divisions especially in the processes of elections. Given this outcome, this study raised a major question. Does access to online political information reinforce ethnic considerations in popular support for specific candidates? To answer this question, the study instrumented the Magic Bullet theory of communication. The "Magic Bullet" or "Hypodermic Needle Theory" of direct influence effects was based on early observations of the effect of mass media as its theoretical foundation. The mixed method research was adopted and data was generated using a short survey and key informant interviews. The study found amongst other issues that the nature and content of the information which may be couched in ways that excite ethnic sentiments and sensationalism as opposed to objectivism. In this light, the platform or medium through which the information is transmitted only give impetus to the content of the information. Secondly, while the use of the internet to drum support for particular candidates may not have highly significant impacts on election outcomes, especially given other external variables involved, it surely contributes to ethnic political proliferation. Thirdly, within the nexus between internet, ethnic politics, and support for particular candidates, variations may exist between what is online and actual political outcomes.

Keywords: Internet, Ethnicity, Elections, Electoral Outcomes, Nigeria

1. INTRODUCTION

The revolution with which the internet used to penetrate the global political scene was not only phenomenal but also transformative in the model of sensitization and mobilization of people towards democracy. Although, the print and electronic media in Nigeria especially the private-owned ones have always been strong instruments in this regard even in the dark days of military dictatorship, (Ajayi, 2007), their reach was limited by such factor as government intimidations and harassments, logistics, limited resources and their elitist ownership and control (Chinedu-Okeke & Obi, 2016). This jinx however has been near completely broken given the advent of the internet and its attendant advantage of easy accessibility and availability irrespective of social status. Thus, the use of Internet in politics in Nigeria and all over the world has continued to grow in a very fast pace in recent times (Paul, 2019). This can be attributed to technological advancement as well as the fact that the emergence of the internet as the new mass medium of the 21st century changed the mass media substantially. Information can now be generated

and distributed at high speed, low cost and broad scope; consequently, there is egalitarian access to the production and the consumption of information (Prat & Stromberg, 2011).

It is worthy to note here that the prevalence of democracy as the more fashionable system of government among the countries of the world is indisputable and participation is the bedrock of any viable and sustainable democratic state (Ibaba, 2010). Significantly, communication and information are the essentials to sensitizing and mobilizing the citizenry for participation. Be it election, public opinion, and other support and demand; Information generation and dissemination on the part of the citizens is also political participation in its own right. Thus, in order to gain popularity, support and/or win elections political actors use a plethora of media to reach out to the citizens cum electorate. In this regard, as mentioned elsewhere the internet has proved to be very effective in recent times.

There is no dissensus that it was the former president of the United States of America (U.S.A), Barack Obama that first proved to the world the benefits of internet in political campaigns (Biswas, Ingle & Roy, 2014; Paul, 2019). During the 2008 U.S presidential elections the Obama Campaign team successfully integrated the use of internet and placed him above other competitors (Panagopoulos, 2009). Since Barack Obama broke the world record in the history of internet use for political purpose during the 2008 U.S presidential elections, many nations and political actors across the globe have continued to embrace the platform to mobilize their citizens and candidates towards active participation in the political process; particularly in elections thus influencing voters' behaviour (Madueke, Nwosu, Ogbonnaya&Anumadu cited in Paul, 2019).

Taking a close look at the Nigerian Political system, it reveals that Nigeria seems to be one of those countries that have embraced the internet platform to mobilize her citizens and candidates to enhance active participation in the political process; particularly in electioneering processes. It was argued that four key stakeholders in the electoral process (the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), politicians/political parties, the electorate and civil society organizations) made extensive use of internet during the 2011 and 2015 elections in Nigeria. They all used the internet platform to achieve a number of interrelated objectives. Based on the argument, it is concluded that internet usage has fundamentally enhanced political communication in Nigeria (Chukwuma, cited in Paul, 2019).

The conversation so far proves that the internet presents is a veritable tool to entrench and strengthen democracy given its usefulness in aiding a greater level of political participation and communication. Nevertheless, whether or not this opportunity can be harnessed by a country to strengthen its democracy will be determined by the character of that state. The Nigerian state is eclectic and enmeshed in ethnic politics therefore, the internet has mostly become a tool for ethnic warfare. It is on this basis that this research is conducted to examine the extent to which the internet drives this process of political communication and serve as a medium for political participation and how it interacts with ethnic politics to determine electoral outcomes.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the Magic Bullet theory of communication. The "Magic Bullet" or "Hypodermic Needle Theory" of direct influence effects was based on early observations of the effect of mass media, as used by Nazi propaganda and the effects of Hollywood in the 1930s and 1940s. People were assumed to be "uniformly controlled by their biologically based 'instincts' and that they react more or less uniformly to whatever 'stimuli' came along". The "Magic Bullet" theory graphically assumes that the media's message is a bullet fired from the "media gun" into the viewer's "head". Similarly, the "Hypodermic Needle Model" uses the same idea of the "shooting" paradigm. It suggests that the media injects its messages straight into the passive audience. This passive audience is immediately affected by these messages. The public essentially cannot escape from the media's influence, and is therefore considered a "sitting duck". Both models suggest that the public is vulnerable to the messages shot at them because of the limited communication tools and the studies of the media's effects on the masses at the time. It means the media explores information in such a way that it injects in the mind of audiences as bullets.

Applying this theory to this study, it could be deduced that in situations where the internet is filled with ethnic support messages and the benefits inherent in ethnic seizure of power in inter-ethnic relations, election outcomes will be determined ethnic politics. This is as the internet does not produce information but only a tool to amplify the already existing character of the state thereby deepening the crisis as more gets initiated into it.

3. METHODS

The paper adopted a mixed method approach to the collection of data. It combined quantitative and qualitative data sources. The research employed the Taro Yamene formula for sample size determination. In doing this, the population of the study area were combined and used as the n-population size to work out a sample that is manageable and sufficient for generalisation. Given the requirements of the Taro Yamene formula, a 0.5 margin of error was utilized and the calculations arrived at a sample size of 400+50 (450) respondents for the survey. Out of this number, 400 was retrieved. This was divided proportionally at the first level across the three states that make up the study area. The proportional distribution was later stratified at the second level in each state to capture locations that has significant populations of major ethnic groups so as to replicate the ethnic distribution of the country and reduce levels of bias in the selection and determination of respondents.

Respondents for the semi-structured interviews were selected across the following segments of the public: Members of the public; Serving Politicians and/or their aids; Academia; Civil society organizations working around issues of election; as well as Public analysts and Journalists. After the determination of respondents and samples across the three study states of Delta, Bayelsa and Rivers using the proportional and stratified methods, the final distribution of questionnaires was done using the simple random sampling technique. For the semi-structured interviews, respondents were selected using the judgemental technique. The simple random technique guaranteed equal chance for respondent selection while the judgemental technique aided in the selection of key informants that fall within the specified population strata and with knowledge of the workings of the key issues raised. Giving the nature of the study, there respondents who opted to volunteer information informally, the researcher was flexible to accommodate these and responded accordingly.

4. The Internet and Democracy

The role of internet in entrenching democracy in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. It is imperative to point out here that participation, freedom of speech and Press independence has been regarded as crucial and indispensable conditions for the effective functioning of a democratic political system (Ajayi, & Adesote, 2015). In fact, in the ancient Greek city states, the cradle of democracy, what was obtainable was the participation of all adult citizen in the affairs of government (Appadorai, 1974; Sabine & Thorson, 1973; Ramaswamy & Mukherji, 2007). It is this model that has evolved to modern democracies, particularly representative democracies due to the large sizes and populations of most modern democratic states.

No wonder Almond and Verba (1963) cited in Ajayi & Adesote (2015) described the Internet as one of the online tools having great democratic potential because it does allow for feedback and encourages the development of “participant” citizens. They said that rather than acting as passive receptors of political information, participant citizens are more sophisticated and engage with political information provided to them and subsequently respond or make “demands” from it. There is no doubting the potential of the internet, especially when utilized by organizations such as political parties or movements, to promote the formation of public opinion that demands political change within democratic states.

One important major role of the internet strengthening democracy could be seen in the area of information circulation during electioneering process. From available data collected from the interviews which were conducted on the role of new internet on democratic consolidation in Nigeria (especially with respect to 2011 general election) by Ojo (2014) cited in Ajayi & Adesote (2015), majority of respondents submitted that internet has helped to overcome previous scarcity of information during the electioneering process,

leading to increased transparency and reduced tension. Moreover, internet-based election monitoring shows encouraging signs of robustness concerning information quality. Findings show that internet remains an effective tool for electoral scrutiny and can help build public trust in the electoral process (Thomas & Michael, n.d; cited in Ajayi & Adesote, 2015).

The frustration felt by some Nigerians in relation to the high rate of corruption and ineffectiveness of Nigerian governments led them to create a Nigerian pro-democracy group in 2010 known as “Enough is Enough” (EIE) which is geared towards promotion of good governance and public accountability in Nigeria. The group seeks to achieve their objective by mobilizing young Nigerians of voting age (18–35), with an emphasis on the use of internet platforms. It orchestrated a major voter education and election monitoring initiative in 2011, dubbed “RSVP” acronym for Register (to vote), Select (your candidates), Vote, and Protect (your vote from fraud). This campaign had an effective internet presence, and a special Internet Tracking Center (SMTC) was also established to monitor popular internet platforms for signs of trouble (Asuni& Farris, 2011).

Presently in Nigeria, corrupt and inept government functionaries are becoming apprehensive of the internet because of its expository and infectious nature. We agree with Chikero that, “What a corrupt nation need is just a powerful platform where citizens can uninterruptedly communicate their common experiences, share ideas on the way out...” (Chikero, 2014).

One other important area of entrenching and deepening the roots of Nigerian democracy through the aid of internet is to defuse tension and reduce the incidence of post electoral violence through prompt release of election results. It has been argued that the greater availability of prompt information on internet on Election Day has done much to mitigate tension and post-election violence. Prompt reporting of incidents through camera-cell/mobile phones, twitter, facebook, YouTube among others is an important role of the internet in entrenching democracy in Nigeria. Therefore, politics has taken a new dimension in recent times with the advent of the new technologies (Ajayi, & Adesote, 2015).

Internet grants many people the chance to participate actively and get fully involved in the political discourse by adding their voices to issues posted on the internet sites. Thus, it advances the frontiers of participatory democracy as a debate avenue and an indispensable aid in actualizing public sphere journalism. It also affords electorates a friendlier avenue of assessing candidates for political offices and promoting transparency in governance. These represent the strength of the new internet (Kenneth, Odoemelam, and Chibuwe, 2012).

The internet platforms are also indispensable tools of sensitization and conscientization in advancing political engagement and mobilization. The implication of the emergence of these media platforms is that citizens and voters/electorates have become more than just passive consumers of digital messages, but also creators of the messages. The implication of the emergence of these media platforms is that citizenry have become more than just passive consumers of digital messages, but also creators of the messages. Internet therefore has the capacity of boosting participation because of its openness, interactive nature, connectedness, textual and audio-visual characteristics appeal (Mayfield, 2010; cited in Ajayi, &Adesote, 2015).

5. Politics and ethnicity in Nigeria

The federal system of government as practiced in Nigeria has its root in the British colonial rule. Nigeria is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world with over 250 ethno-linguistic groups. All the hitherto existing ethnic groups in the area now known as Nigeria, prior to the arrival of British colonialists, belonged to different empires, kingdoms and societies, which were traditionally administered. There was no much interaction between most of these groups; and the relationship between the ones that were interacting was characterized by much conflict and little cooperation. It was a case of independent and autonomous nationalities (Etekepe, 2007; Majekodunmi 2015).

Consequent upon the formal British occupation of the area in 1900 was the emergent of three separate territories. These include Lagos, the Southern protectorate and the Northern protectorate which were administered separately. It was until 1914 when Lord Lugard, for the purpose of administrative

convenience amalgamated these territories that these multi ethnic groups became under a single administration. In 1945, the Sir Arthur Richard constitution divided the territory into three regions along the ethnic lines of the majority ethnic groups in the manner of Northern Region (Hausa-Fulani), Western Region (Yoruba) and Eastern Region (Igbo), leaving over 247 other minority ethnic groups apart.

The implication here is that inter-segmental imbalance and ethnic politics emerged (Etekepe 2007). Federalism was formally established in 1945 by the Oliver Lyttleton constitution, which granted substantial autonomy to the regions in some matters including establishment of regional civil service and judicial system (Daniel 2017). This became finally consolidated at independence in 1960 when the country emerged as a federation delicately balanced on the tripod pedestal of the three major ethnic groups (Tyoden, 2000; cited in Daniel, 2015).

The federal system that was practiced in the pre-military era now known as the first republic was fundamentally different from the post-military eras like the second, third and fourth republics. The then three and later four Regions were comparatively autonomous federating units. Conversely, with the intrusion of the military in 1966, federalism changed shape in Nigeria. The autonomy and independence of the regions was compromised as a hierarchical structure emerged. A very powerful central government emerged and the states which succeeded the regions became mere appendages of the central government. This represents a synopsis of the federal system of government as currently practiced in Nigeria with all its attendant problems.

What is important from the above is that fact that the evolution of politics and the operations of the Nigerian Federal state has created and sent in motion dynamics that have contributed and, in a way, highlighted the fractured and fragmented nature of politics and political outcomes in the country. How then has the proliferation of the internet, democratic processes shaped or affected electoral outcomes in the Country? Noting that the internet has emerged as a veritable instrument for communication and the dissemination of politically relevant information, how much has these processes of communication shaped or affected ethnic politics in the country? How well has this shaped ethnic consideration and ethnic political mobilization? It is on this basis that this paper raised the question: does access to online political information reinforce ethnic considerations in popular support for specific candidates?

6. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The study attempted to gauge how much and to what extent access to online political information reinforces ethnic considerations in the public support for particular candidates and populist mobilizations that tend to reinforce ethnic perspectives in politics in the country. To effectively do this, the study raised five corollary questions in a short survey. These questions were complemented with key informant interviews. The data in this regard is presented below.

Table 1: Data outcomes on the nexus between Online Political Information, Ethnicity and Popular Support for Political Elites in Nigeria

	Online Political Information, Ethnicity and Popular Support for Political Elites in Nigeria	SA	A	D	SD
		(4)	(3)	(2)	(1)
1.	In recent times, ethnic support for political elites is reinforced by online political information on such elites	96 (24%)	176 (44%)	80 (20%)	48 (12%)
2.	Online political information contributes to increasing ethnic and political fragmentation	80 (20%)	224 (56%)	64 (16%)	32 (8%)
3.	Access to online information does not significantly influence electoral outcomes in Nigeria	144 (36%)	96 (24%)	96 (24%)	64 (16%)
4.	There is a significant difference between the level of online Political support and actual political outcomes in Nigeria.	176 (44%)	144 (36%)	32 (8%)	48 (12%)
5.	Increasing Internet support and access to online political information does not have significant impacts on election outcomes in Nigeria	112 (28%)	96 (24%)	80 (20%)	112 (28%)

Source: Author's Field Work, 2021

In attempting to answer the question on the nexus between online political information, ethnicity and popular support for particular political actors, we started with interrogating whether the internet and online political information has contributed to the ethnic support base of political actors. On this, the following data was collated.

Table 2: Online political information and ethnic support of political actors.

Online Political Information, Ethnicity and Popular Support for Political Elites in Nigeria	SA	A	D	SD
In recent times, ethnic support for political elites is reinforced by online political information on such elites	(4) 96 (24%)	(3) 176 (44%)	(2) 80 (20%)	(1) 48 (12%)

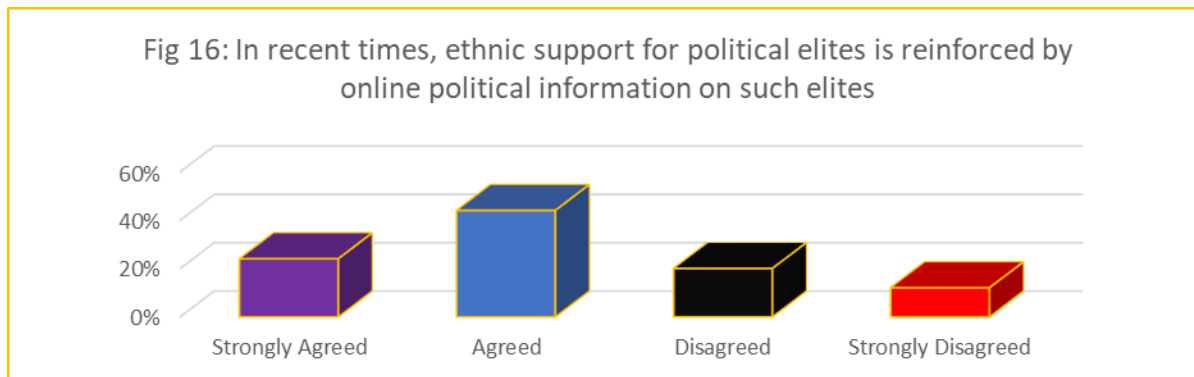


Figure 1: The Internet and Ethnic support for Political Elites
Source: Author’s Field Work, 2021

As the data shows, 24% of the respondent hold very strong opinion that indeed the internet can be instrumented to reinforce ethnic support of particular political elites. In like manner but in more moderate terms, 44% of the respondents also opined that the internet has been used to drum up support for political actors, while playing on ethnic sentiments. Respondents who strongly disagreed with this notion make up for just 12% while those who disagreed make up for only 20% of the total respondents. A number of issues can be highlighted from this distribution.

As one key informant noted:

“It has become very easy for people to bring ethnicity into every discussion. The internet and social media platforms have made it even easier. You only need to look at a post on social media and you will be surprised at the kind of ethnic differentiation and fragmentation in the comment section, especially where the issue raised deals with politics and power. It has become one way of showing ethnic support or hate against any one politician, especially on that is currently holding a political office” (Author’s personal correspondence, 2021).

More than the source of the information, the nature and content of the information is also very important. As McCauley (2014) noted, elites tend to mobilize supporters according to prevailing cleavages, which could be ethnic or religious. In this context, the platform or medium through which the information is transmitted only give impetus to the content of the information. This impetus is the calibre and number of persons reached through the medium. The implication is that online political messages can be couched in ways that seek to transmit and reinforce ethnic sentiments in the bid to build and enlarge the support base of ethnic minded political actors on one hand, or opportunistic political actors who instrument the internet

to achieve political goals. As noted by a key informant, attention was directed to the fact that increasing number of political elites are resorting to using professionals handling their online presence, a goal of which is to increase popular support and followership, and if this means pandying to specific ethnic interests, so be it. As the respondent noted:

“most politician now pandy to ethnic sentiments and followership which is obvious from sites like Facebook. If you take a cursory look at the followership you will often find names aligning with the ethnic identity of the politician and these politicians in other to maintain this base tend to share information that excites said base” (Author’s personal correspondence, 2021).

In such instances, the tendency to not just pandy to followers but also to draw in like-minded new followers becomes very high. However, what needs to further be interrogated is whether this followership and ethic linkages translates to explicit political gains in terms of electoral outcomes.

Interrogating the internet, political information, and ethnicity linkage further, the survey questionnaire queried whether the instrumentation of the internet to disseminate political information contributes to ethnic and political fragmentation in the country.

Table 3: Online Political Information and Ethnic/Political Fragmentation

Online Political Information, Ethnicity and Popular Support for Political Elites in Nigeria	SA	A	D	SD
	(4)	(3)	(2)	(1)
Online political information contributes to increasing ethnic and political fragmentation	80 (20%)	224 (56%)	64 (16%)	32 (8%)

The above data is presented in the figure below.

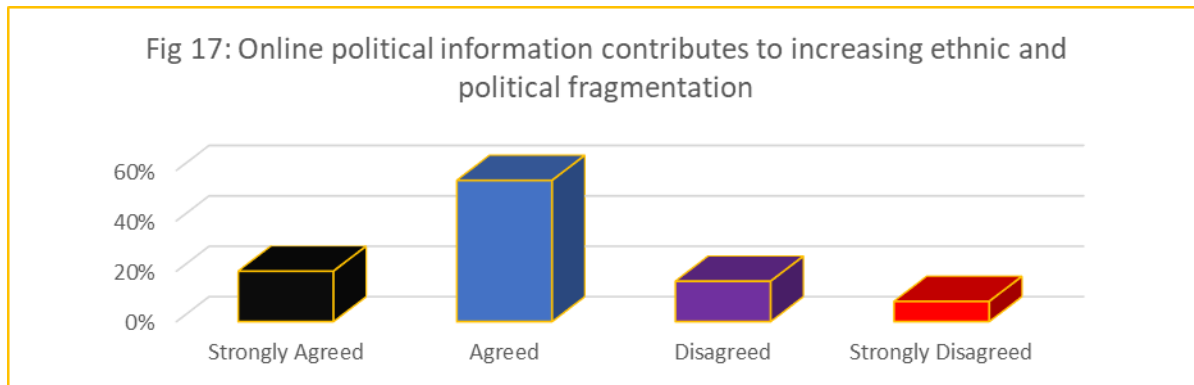


Figure 2: Online Political Information and Ethno-Political Fragmentation in Nigeria

Source: Author’s Field Work, 2021

From the data distribution, a combined 76% of the respondents (strongly agree, 20%; Agree, 56%) are of the position that the use of the internet for the dissemination of political information contributes to increasing ethno-political fragmentation in the country. On this notion, 16% disagree while only 8% strongly disagree with it. What we can deduced from this data and respondents’ position is the fact that there is an increasing awareness around the prevailing ethno-political fragmentations in the country. In this light, the use of the internet to disseminate information on political issues only highlights this awareness. More so, it provides a platform for venting and expression of ethnic sentiments and as such increases the public’s knowledge and awareness of seemingly ethnic positions.

We can also argue, based on the above that given the recent inclinations of the incumbent President Buhari to appoint persons of Northern extraction into strategic political offices and the use of the internet by most news agencies to disseminate these appointments, the underlying ethno-political sentiments are given platforms for expressions through the internet. This in itself serves as a possible indicator of how the internet contributes to expressions of ethno-political sentiments.

Moving forward, the study next queried the growing influence of the Internet on political outcomes by trying to connect the use of the internet for electioneering. The data for this is presented below.

Table 4: The Internet and Electoral Outcomes in Nigeria

Online Political Information, Ethnicity and Popular Support for Political Elites in Nigeria	SA	A	D	SD
Access to online information does not significantly influence electoral outcomes in Nigeria	(4) 144 (36%)	(3) 96 (24%)	(2) 96 (24%)	(1) 64 (16%)

Source: Author's Field Work, 2021

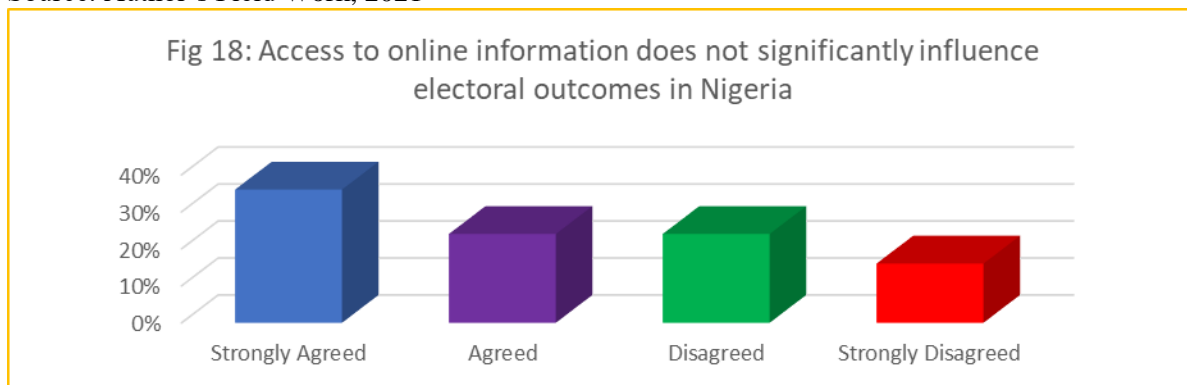


Figure 3: The Internet, Online Political Information and Electoral Outcomes in Nigeria

Source: Author's Field Work, 2021

From the above distribution, 36% of the respondents strongly agreed that access to online political information does not significantly influence electoral outcomes. This is also supported by another 24% who opined that indeed, access to online political information in the form of campaigns and policy initiatives does not significantly influence election outcomes. For these respondents, the interpretation is that a political party or candidate may have large online followers and have significant number of the voting population access and follow his campaigns, but that may not necessarily convert into number of votes for the candidate or political party. On the other hand, another 24% of the respondents disagree and are of the opinion that online support influences election outcomes in the country. Another 16% strongly agree with this position too that online support for political parties and candidates translates into election outcomes for these candidates and parties.

From our interviews with key informants across sectors, the opinions were also variable as some held that yes, it is possible that online support can translate into election victory based on turnout for that candidate. Others hold that this may not necessarily be so. In all, the interviews highlighted certain conditions and contexts that might interfere with how significant the nexus between online political support and election outcome is. The prevailing themes and factors include the nature of the electoral system, electoral dynamics, number of actual voters versus registered voters, actual voters versus voters with internet access and access to political information especially online election campaigns.

As a follow-up, the survey asked respondents if they think there are significant differences in the levels of online support and actual political outcomes in Nigeria, especially in the areas of government policies. The responses to the above are presented below.

Table 16: Online political support and political outcomes in Nigeria.

Online Political Information, Ethnicity and Popular Support for Political Elites in Nigeria	SA	A	D	SD
	(4)	(3)	(2)	(1)
There is a significant difference between the level of online Political support and actual political outcomes in Nigeria.	176 (44%)	144 (36%)	32 (8%)	48 (12%)

Source: Author’s field work, 2021

The data from the above table is presented and highlighted in the figure below to aid our analysis. As the figure and table show, in the areas of policy, there is some level of convergence between the level of online support or opposition and actual political outcomes. A total of 80% of the respondent hold this opinion. While 44% strongly agree, 36% moderately hold the same opinion. Only 12% strongly disagree with the position that online support or opposition has significant influences on actual outcomes where government policies are concerned.

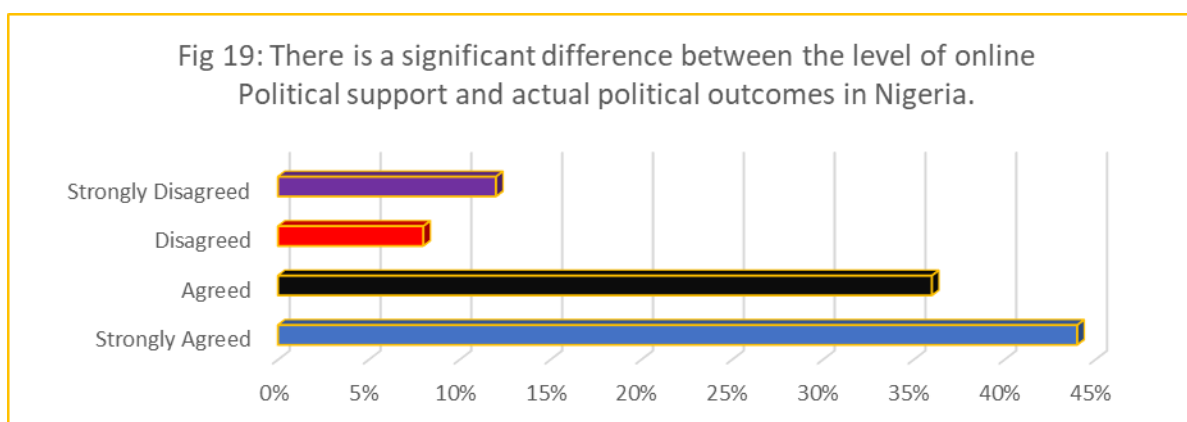


Figure 4: Online political support and political outcomes in Nigeria.

Source: Author’s Field Work, 2021

This distribution has a number of implications, especially when analysed in relation to objective realities in the country in recent times. Online political expressions, actions and oppositions have significantly influenced or shape government action. However, it needs to be noted that government action poor response to online trends may not necessarily be constructive and may not be in the better interest of the public. However, the significant point to note is that such responses are often times reactive to prevailing public opinions on the internet.

From the data and the analysis aimed at answering the key questions on online political information and ethnic support for political actors, the following key points are made. As the data distribution shows, within the context of populist mobilization, ethnic political support is reinforced through the instrumentation of political information online. As the data also shows in relation to ethnic support, political fragmentation through ethnic mobilization is reinforced using the internet and online platforms.

Thirdly, the data also shows that online political information may not necessarily influence election outcomes but if and when the medium is used to mobilize ethnic sentiments in times of elections, then there is the possibility that it may have some influence on the outcomes especially turn out. Still on this, there influence on election outcomes may also be influenced by certain ethnic reasons depending on the nature of ethnic politics in the area under study. Finally, with respect to populist mobilizations using online medium, variations may exist between the levels of online support and actual political outcomes.

7. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Having analyzed data relating to the main argument in this paper, this section discusses the outcomes of the data from the short survey as well as the interview outcomes in relation to the key issues raised.

With regards to the main argument, the data does suggest a nexus between online political information dissemination and the enhancement of ethnic-based political support. However, there are some intervening variables for this nexus to be significant. The first is the nature and content of the information which may be couched in ways that excite ethnic sentiments and sensationalism as opposed to objectivism. In this light, the platform or medium through which the information is transmitted only give impetus to the content of the information. Where messages transmit and reinforce ethnic sentiments, then the internet will function as a driver of ethnic fragmentations. The instrumentation of the internet in this regard can be exploited by opportunistic political actors to achieve selfish gains. Given this kind of outcome, it is logical to conclude that there online political information and its dissemination can be used to reinforce populist mobilizations along ethnic lines especially in multi-ethnic societies with weak political institutions. However, the dissemination of political information and citizens' response to it may also spur government action that may be repressive or supportive depending on the context. The #EndSARS protest is a case in point.

Again, the data suggests that most often than not, while the internet provides an avenue for the stoking of ethnic sentiments, the degree of response and how much support it contributes to a candidate may also depend on how much external interference and re-interpretation of the information, on the one hand, or an external actor's position on how the information should be interpreted that gives credence to mobilizing support for or against a candidate. These issues may to varying degrees shape the nexus between the internet, ethnicity and support for politicians in the country.

8. CONCLUSION

Based on the data and the analysis made, this study made the following conclusions. Ethnic political support is reinforced through the instrumentation of political information online. In this context, political fragmentation, through ethnic mobilization is reinforced using the internet and online platforms. As the data shows, it is also important to note that online political information may not necessarily influence election outcomes but if and when the medium is used to mobilize ethnic sentiments in times of elections, then there is the possibility that it may have some influence on the outcomes especially turn out. Finally, with respect to the internet, political information and ethnicity, variations may exist between the levels of online support and actual political outcomes, especially in times of elections.

With the above findings, it is logical to conclude by noting that online political information, when instrumented in multi-ethnic locations with weak political institutions, may increase ethnic fragmentations as well as the support of opportunistic political actors.

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