



Research Article

Affective Politics and Voters' Perception in the 2023 Delta State Gubernatorial Election

Bertrand Ogorchukwu Ojeh, Daniel T. Ezegwu, PhD & Olusegun Oyakhire Oisamoje, PhD

About Article

Article History

Submission: October 5, 2026

Acceptance: October 8, 2026

Publication: October 12, 2026

Keywords:

Affective politics, Emotional contagion, Political communication, Voter perception, 2023 Delta State gubernatorial election.

About the Authors

Bertrand Ogorchukwu Ojeh

Department of Mass Communication,
Glorious Vision University, Ogwa,
Nigeria.

Daniel T. Ezegwu, PhD

Department of Mass Communication,
University of Delta, Agbor

&

Olusegun Oyakhire Oisamoje, PhD

Department of Mass Communication,
Glorious Vision University, Ogwa,
Nigeria

ABSTRACT

This study examined affective politics and voters' perception in the 2023 Delta State gubernatorial election. The study was anchored on Emotional Contagion Theory, which explained how emotions communicated by political actors can be transferred to audiences and subsequently influence their attitudes and judgements. The study adopted a survey research design. The population comprised 3,221,697 registered voters in Delta State, from which a sample size of 400 respondents was determined using Yamane's formula. A multi-stage sampling technique was used to select respondents from Delta North, Delta Central and Delta South senatorial districts. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire containing four-point Likert-scale items ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The instrument was validated by experts and tested for reliability, yielding a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.79. Of the 400 copies administered, 388 were successfully retrieved and found usable, representing a 97.0% valid response rate. Data were analysed using frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation. A mean score of 2.50 was adopted as the acceptance threshold. The findings showed that voters were exposed to affective political messages that appealed to emotions such as hope, trust, fear, anger, pride and political loyalty. The findings further indicated that these emotional appeals influenced voters' perceptions of the candidates, particularly their perceived credibility, competence, trustworthiness and suitability for leadership. The study concluded that affective politics constituted an important dimension of voter judgement during the 2023 Delta State gubernatorial election, although its influence was reinforced by existing party loyalty and political affiliations. The study recommended that political actors should prioritise issue-based and responsible emotional communication, electoral stakeholders should promote voter education that encourages critical evaluation of campaign messages, and political parties should discourage manipulative emotional appeals that may deepen political division.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The 2023 Delta State gubernatorial election represented an important moment in the state's political landscape, characterised by intense campaigns, strong political competition and considerable voter engagement. Beyond policy issues and candidate qualifications, the election was also shaped by affective politics, which refers to the role of emotions in political communication, perception and behaviour (Akinfeleye & Ojebuyi, 2021). Emotions such as hope, trust, anger, fear, pride and resentment can influence how voters interpret political messages, evaluate candidates and make electoral choices. In Nigeria, where political competition is often highly personalised, campaign actors frequently employ emotional appeals through speeches, slogans, rallies, visuals, traditional media and social media to create favourable impressions of their candidates or negative perceptions of their opponents. Previous studies have shown that emotional narratives surrounding political identity, development, insecurity, marginalisation and political grievances can strongly influence voter attitudes and political participation (Omilusi, 2021).

The influence of affective politics has been evident in several Nigerian elections. The 2015 Rivers State gubernatorial election, for instance, was characterised by intense rivalry, patronage networks and emotionally charged mobilisation involving the political camps of Nyesom Wike and Rotimi Amaechi, with political competition linked to intimidation and struggles over access to state resources (Sommie & Egobueze, 2021). Similarly, the 2019 Kaduna State elections demonstrated how fear, anger, group grievances and concerns about political marginalisation could shape electoral attitudes and contribute

to political tension (*Human Rights Watch*, 2019). The 2023 presidential election also provided a different expression of affective politics through the youth-driven "Obidient" movement, where hope, generational identity, dissatisfaction with the political establishment and the desire for change became important sources of political mobilisation (Agbim, Etumnu, & Iredibia, 2023). These examples demonstrate that affective politics may operate through both positive emotions, such as hope and enthusiasm, and negative emotions, such as fear, anger and resentment.

Recent studies have further demonstrated the growing importance of rhetorical, emotional and social media communication in shaping political perceptions and participation. Nwaoboli, Uchenunu and Asemah (2024a) found that voters' perceptions of social media rhetorical devices used by political candidates during the 2023 presidential election were influenced by the nature and presentation of campaign messages, while their study of the rhetorical strategies of selected party flag bearers showed that social media provided candidates with important opportunities to construct persuasive political narratives and shape audience interpretation (Nwaoboli, Uchenunu, & Asemah, 2024b). In a comparative analysis of Peter Obi and Bola Ahmed Tinubu's social media campaigns, Nwaoboli, Uchenunu and Asemah (2024c) further demonstrated the use of distinctive rhetorical strategies in constructing candidate identities and communicating political appeals during the same election. These findings are complemented by Nwaoboli, Ogunyemi and Ezegwu (2023), whose analysis of MTN's *No be Juju be that* campaign showed how visual communication and emotional appeals could

be combined to evoke particular audience responses, suggesting the broader relevance of affective communication across different media contexts. Similarly, Arijeniwa and Nwaoboli (2023) established that social media had become an important platform for political participation and public discourse among Nigerian youths, creating opportunities for political messages and emotional responses to circulate widely. Collectively, these studies indicate that contemporary political communication increasingly involves the strategic use of rhetorical, visual, emotional and digital resources to shape audience perceptions, identities and political engagement, thereby providing a useful basis for examining the role of affective politics in the 2023 Delta State gubernatorial election.

Against this background, the 2023 Delta State gubernatorial election provided an important context for examining how emotions shaped voter perceptions. The election, held on 18 March 2023, featured Sheriff Oborevwori of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), Ovie Omo-Agege of the All Progressives Congress (APC) and Ken Pela of the Labour Party (LP). Oborevwori emerged victorious with 360,234 votes, Omo-Agege received 240,229 votes while Ken Pela came third with 48,027 votes, *Independent National Electoral Commission*, (2023). The election was preceded by internal party disputes, legal controversies and highly competitive campaigns, all of which generated emotions of loyalty, anxiety, resentment, trust and expectations of change among supporters. During the campaigns, Oborevwori's message of continuity and stability was contrasted with Omo-Agege's emphasis on change and dissatisfaction with the PDP

administration. These competing narratives were amplified through traditional and social media, where campaign messages, political commentary, memes, videos and other emotionally charged content circulated widely. The socio-economic and cultural conditions of Delta State, including concerns about development, unemployment, resource control and regional identity, further provided issues around which emotional political appeals could be constructed (Ide & Lind, 2018; Okonta, 2019). The present study therefore examined affective politics and voter perception of political party candidates during the 2023 Delta State gubernatorial election.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Affective politics has become an important feature of electoral communication, as political actors increasingly use emotions such as hope, trust, fear, anger, pride and resentment to influence voters' attitudes towards political candidates. However, it remains unclear to what extent these emotional appeals shaped voters' perceptions of the candidates, particularly their credibility, competence, trustworthiness and suitability for leadership. The absence of sufficient empirical evidence on this relationship creates a gap in understanding the role of emotions in subnational electoral politics. The problem, therefore, is the limited empirical understanding of how affective politics influenced voter perception of political party candidates during the 2023 Delta State gubernatorial election.

2.0 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Identify the affective appeals used by the political parties candidates during the 2023 Delta state gubernatorial

- election.
2. Ascertain how voters perceived the affective politics of political party candidates during the 2023 Delta state gubernatorial election.
3. Determine the extent to which affective politics influenced voters' perception of the candidates' during the 2023 Delta state gubernatorial election.

3.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Emotional Contagion Theory

The Emotional Contagion Theory was developed by Elaine Hatfield, John T. Cacioppo and Richard L. Rapson in 1993. The theory explains how emotions can spread from one person to another or across groups, often influencing collective attitudes, perceptions and behaviour. The theory is associated with the work of Hatfield, Cacioppo and Rapson, who described emotional contagion as the tendency of individuals to automatically mimic and synchronise with the emotional expressions, vocal tones, postures and behaviours of others. The theory assumes that when people are exposed to emotional displays such as joy, fear, anger or enthusiasm, they may unconsciously adopt similar emotional states. In contemporary communication, emotional contagion extends beyond face-to-face interactions to mass media and digital platforms, where images, hashtags, videos, slogans and other affective cues can circulate rapidly among large audiences (Boler & Davis, 2020). Chouliaraki (2021) argues that political and public communication can encourage audiences not only to understand particular issues but also to experience the emotions attached to them. Similarly, Lee, Rojas and Yamamoto (2022) explain that social media can intensify emotional contagion through repeated cycles of liking,

sharing and commenting on emotionally charged content. Thus, emotions can become socially reinforced and develop into shared feelings within political communities.

The theory is particularly relevant to political communication because political actors deliberately use emotional messages to create identification with candidates, parties and political causes. Hartevelt, Mendoza and Rooduijn (2022) observe that political actors can use emotions such as anger, fear and pride to strengthen group identity and encourage favourable attitudes towards political allies while creating negative feelings towards opponents. Törnberg, Andersson, Lindgren and Banisch (2021) further suggest that digital platforms can amplify emotionally intense political content, thereby increasing the circulation of affective messages and contributing to political polarisation. The theory, however, has been criticised for sometimes presenting emotional transfer as overly automatic. Marchal (2022) argues that individuals do not simply absorb emotions but interpret them according to their social context, culture and personal experiences. There are also concerns that the theory may not sufficiently explain power relations, including whose emotions receive greater visibility and whose emotional expressions are suppressed. Despite these limitations, the theory remains useful for explaining how repeated exposure to emotional political communication can influence individual and collective perceptions.

The relevance of Emotional Contagion Theory to the present study is in its ability to explain how emotional appeals communicated during the 2023 Delta State gubernatorial election could influence voters' perceptions of political candidates.

Campaign messages that repeatedly associated candidates with hope, trust, stability, pride or competence could encourage voters to develop similar positive feelings towards them. Conversely, messages that generated fear, anger or resentment towards particular candidates or political parties could contribute to negative perceptions. Therefore, Emotional Contagion Theory provided an appropriate framework for explaining how affective appeals communicated by candidates and their supporters were spread among voters and subsequently shaped their perceptions of the candidates' credibility, competence, trustworthiness and suitability for leadership during the 2023 Delta State gubernatorial election.

4.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1 Affective Politics

The concept of affective politics has been widely discussed in political science, psychology and communication studies, with scholars offering multiple definitions that highlight the role of emotions in political behaviour. According to Marcus, Neuman and Mackuen (2000), affective politics refers to the influence of emotions such as enthusiasm, fear and anger in shaping how individuals evaluate candidates and make electoral choices. This definition emphasises emotions as central to the political decision-making process rather than peripheral influences.

In a similar vein, Agbaje (2020) defines affective politics as the deliberate use of emotional appeals in political communication to mobilise or demobilise voter participation. This perspective points to the strategic nature of affect in political campaigns, where actors design messages not

merely to inform but to stir emotional responses that directly affect turnout and support. Valentino, Brader, Groerendyk, Gregorowicz & Hutchings (2011) conceptualise affective politics as the development of emotional attachments, positive or negative that voters form towards political parties and candidates. These attachments, according to the scholars, often outweigh the importance of issue positions or rational considerations, thereby making emotions a stronger predictor of voter perception. Adding to this, Huddy, Mason and Aaroe (2015) describe affective politics as the reliance on partisan feelings and affective attachments in forming political judgments, frequently independent of substantive policy debates. This definition underscores the power of emotions in bypassing rational policy evaluation, showing how voters can support or oppose candidates based primarily on emotional identification.

4.1.1 Gubernatorial Elections in Delta State

Delta State was created on 27 August 1991 by the military administration of General Ibrahim Babangida from the former Bendel State (Okocha, 2018). The creation followed demands for greater political autonomy and representation among groups such as the Urhobo, Itsekiri, Ijaw, Isoko and Anioma. The first gubernatorial election was held in December 1991, with Felix Ibru of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) emerging as the first civilian governor. His administration was cut short by the return of military rule in 1993. Democratic governance returned in 1999, when James Ibori of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) became governor, establishing the party's dominance in the state. Subsequent elections reinforced this

dominance, with Emmanuel Uduaghan succeeding Ibori in 2007 and Ifeanyi Okowa winning in 2015. The informal zoning arrangement among Delta North, Delta Central and Delta South also became an important feature of gubernatorial politics, promoting appeals to equity, inclusion and political loyalty (Agbaje, 2020; Okocha, 2018).

The 2019 election saw Okowa retain the governorship, while the 2023 election produced another PDP victory with Sheriff Oborevwori defeating Ovie Omo-Agege of the APC and Ken Pela of the Labour Party. INEC recorded 360,234 votes for Oborevwori, 240,229 for Omo-Agege and 48,027 for Pela (INEC, 2023). Campaigns during the election featured appeals to continuity, stability, trust, dissatisfaction and political change. The history of gubernatorial elections in Delta State therefore demonstrates the continuing influence of party dominance and zoning, as well as the growing role of emotional and identity-based appeals in shaping electoral competition and voters' perceptions.

4.1.2 The Changing Dynamics of Affective Politics in Nigerian Elections

Affective politics has been a persistent feature of Nigerian elections since independence in 1960, with political actors using emotions such as hope, fear, anger, pride, trust and resentment alongside policy issues to mobilise voters. During the First Republic, the major political parties—the Northern People's Congress (NPC), Action Group (AG) and National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), were strongly associated with regional and ethnic identities. Consequently, political support was often influenced by feelings of group loyalty, fear of marginalisation and attachment to political

leaders. The Second Republic (1979–1983) continued this pattern, as the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) appealed to national unity and continuity, while the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), under Obafemi Awolowo, drew on loyalty, regional identity and cultural pride. The Nigerian People's Party (NPP), led by Nnamdi Azikiwe, similarly benefited from the emotional attachment surrounding his status as “Zik of Africa”. Affective politics became particularly visible during the Babangida transition, especially in the 1993 presidential election, when Moshood Abiola's campaign appealed to hope, unity and national renewal through the message of “farewell to poverty”. The subsequent annulment of the election generated widespread feelings of anger, betrayal and injustice, demonstrating how emotional responses to electoral processes can influence political mobilisation and instability (Agbaje, 2020; Ibrahim, 2023).

The return to democratic rule in 1999 further entrenched affective politics as a major feature of electoral campaigns. Olusegun Obasanjo and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) were presented not only in terms of political competence but also as symbols of national reconciliation, stability and a return to democratic governance after years of military rule (Suberu, 2015). In the 2003 election, the PDP used appeals to stability and continuity, while Muhammadu Buhari and the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) mobilised anger against perceived corruption, mismanagement and electoral malpractice. The 2007 election similarly demonstrated the importance of emotional appeals, as Umaru Musa Yar'Adua was presented as a humble and trustworthy leader, while opposition candidates attempted to mobilise dissatisfaction with the PDP administration (Agbaje, 2020). Following Yar'Adua's death,

Goodluck Jonathan's political rise introduced another important emotional narrative. His personal story of growing up in modest circumstances, popularly associated with the “I had no shoes” narrative, generated feelings of hope, sympathy and identification among many Nigerians (Omilusi, 2021). At the same time, Buhari's continued opposition to the PDP drew heavily on anger over perceived failures of governance, creating an increasingly polarised emotional environment (Ibrahim & Hassan, 2015).

The 2015 election marked a major turning point in the development of affective politics in Nigeria. Buhari and the newly formed All Progressives Congress (APC) successfully mobilised widespread anger over corruption, insecurity and the PDP's sixteen years in power. The campaign slogan “Change” became an emotional symbol of dissatisfaction and the desire for a new political direction. Buhari's image as a disciplined and incorruptible leader further strengthened this emotional appeal, contributing to the APC's historic victory and the first democratic transfer of power between political parties at the federal level. Jonathan's campaign, in contrast, attempted to mobilise fear by warning about possible instability and national division under an APC government, but the appeal was insufficient to overcome the public demand for change (Adebani, 2017). The 2019 election continued this pattern, with Buhari's campaign emphasising continuity, anti-corruption and national security, while Atiku Abubakar and the PDP sought to mobilise frustration over economic difficulties and perceived failures of governance (Omotola, 2019; Resnick, 2019; Suberu, 2020). These elections demonstrate that affective politics operates through

competing emotional narratives, with political actors attempting to generate either positive attachment to their candidates or negative feelings towards their opponents.

The 2023 elections further demonstrated the changing nature of affective politics, particularly through the increased role of social media and youth mobilisation. Bola Ahmed Tinubu's “Emi lo kan” message appealed to ideas of political entitlement, loyalty and regional identity, while Peter Obi's Labour Party campaign mobilised hope, anger, generational consciousness and dissatisfaction with the established political order. The emergence of the “Obidient Movement” demonstrated how social media could transform emotional political engagement into large-scale mobilisation through slogans, memes, videos and other forms of digital communication (Olawale, 2023; *Vanguard*, 2023). Beyond individual campaigns, the media, religion, ethnicity and insecurity have remained important channels through which affective politics operates in Nigeria.

Newspapers, broadcasting organisations and digital platforms have frequently amplified emotionally charged political narratives, while religious and ethnic identities have generated feelings of solidarity, fear, pride and marginalisation (Akinfeleye, 2017; Suberu, 2015; Ibrahim & Hassan, 2015). Young people have also become increasingly important participants in emotionally driven digital politics, particularly around issues such as unemployment, corruption and poor governance (BBC, 2019; Resnick, 2019). At the same time, emotional mobilisation has sometimes contributed to political violence, as demonstrated by the post-election violence

of 2011 and the use of fear surrounding terrorism and insecurity in subsequent campaigns (*Human Rights Watch*, 2011; Omotola, 2019). The evolution of Nigerian elections therefore shows a gradual movement from predominantly ethnic and regional forms of affective mobilisation to more complex combinations of identity, personality, media, digital communication, political grievances and emotional appeals, making affective politics an important factor in understanding contemporary voter perception and electoral behaviour.

4.1.3 Review of Empirical Studies

Opone & Ikuni (2024), in their article “*Godfatherism and Nigeria's 2023 General Elections: The Case of Delta State*,” examined how political godfatherism influenced the conduct and outcome of the 2023 general elections in Delta State. The main objective was to investigate the extent to which political patrons shaped candidate selection, electoral processes, and voter behaviour in the state. Anchored on the Elite Theory, the study argued that dominant political figures maintain control over political systems through patron–client relationships.

The researchers employed a qualitative descriptive method, drawing data from interviews with political stakeholders, journalists, and civil society representatives. Their findings revealed that godfatherism remained a pervasive element in Delta politics, influencing campaign funding, candidate emergence, and voter mobilisation through emotional loyalty rather than ideology. The study concluded that godfatherism undermines political accountability and democratic maturity. The

authors recommended stronger institutional reforms and political education to reduce elite capture of the electoral process. This study directly relates to the current study on as both explore emotional and relational dynamics shaping voter perception. However, while Opone and Ikuni focused on elite influence and patronage, the current study emphasises emotional persuasion and affective appeals used by candidates to shape voters' feelings and perceptions.

In “*Party Politics, Dearth of Political Ideology, and the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria*,” Babalola (2024) explored the ideological weakness of Nigerian political parties and its implications for electoral outcomes. The study's objective was to analyse how the absence of strong ideological foundations led to voter apathy and personality-driven politics. The work was rooted in the Ideological Vacuum Theory, arguing that weak political institutions foster emotional and ethnic-driven voting rather than issue-based politics.

The methodology employed was qualitative content analysis, focusing on party manifestos, media reports, and expert interviews. Findings showed that political campaigns in Nigeria largely relied on emotional and regional appeals, reinforcing affective loyalty rather than policy conviction. The author concluded that Nigerian politics remains dominated by sentiments and personality cults, which weaken democratic consolidation. Recommendations were made for strengthening party ideologies and voter education. This aligns closely with the Delta State gubernatorial study, as both underscore the dominance of emotional appeals over

ideological clarity. However, while Babalola discussed the presidential election at a national scale, the current study provides a focused state-level examination of similar affective dynamics.

In “*Voting Pattern and Voting Behaviour in 2023 Presidential Elections in Nigeria: A cursory Prognosis*,” Idowu and Iyabode (2024) investigated the socio-cultural and emotional factors influencing voting patterns. The objective was to examine how ethnic identity, religion and emotional affinity shaped voters' choices. Anchored on the Social Identity Theory, the study adopted a quantitative descriptive survey using structured questionnaires across six geopolitical zones. Findings revealed that emotional and identity-driven affiliations determined candidate preference more than policy considerations. The authors concluded that affective loyalties continue to dominate Nigerian elections. Recommendations were made for inclusive political campaigns and civic education. This research closely mirrors the Delta State study, as both focus on emotional and perceptual factors shaping voter decisions. The key difference is scale as theirs is national, while the current study offers a state-level perspective.

5.0 METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a survey research design. The population comprised 3,221,697 registered voters in Delta State, from which a sample size of 400 respondents was determined using Yamane's formula. A multi-stage sampling technique was used to select respondents across the three senatorial districts of the state. At the first stage, Delta State was stratified into Delta North, Delta Central and Delta South. At the second stage,

two Local Government Areas (LGAs) were selected from each senatorial district: Oshimili South and Ndokwa East from Delta North, Ethiope East and Ughelli North from Delta Central, and Warri South and Isoko North from Delta South. At the third stage, two communities or wards were selected from each of the six LGAs, while at the final stage, adult voters who were registered and participated in or had direct exposure to the 2023 Delta State gubernatorial election were purposively selected as respondents. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire containing demographic items and statements measuring exposure to affective political messages, emotional responses and voter perception of the major political candidates.

The questionnaire items were measured using a four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1). The questionnaire was validated by experts and subjected to a reliability test, which produced a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.79, indicating acceptable internal consistency. Of the 400 copies administered, 388 were successfully retrieved and found usable, while 12 copies were not retrieved, representing a 97.0% valid response rate. The collected data were coded and analysed using SPSS version 26. Frequencies and percentages were used to present the distribution of responses, while the mean was used to determine the level of agreement with each statement. A mean score of 2.50 was adopted as the acceptance threshold; therefore, items with a mean score of 2.50 and above were accepted, while items with a mean score below 2.50 were rejected. Standard deviation was also used to indicate the degree of variation in respondents' responses.

5.1 Data Presentation

Table 1: Affective Appeals Used by Political Candidates during the 2023 Delta State Gubernatorial Election

Affective Appeals	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean
Candidates used hope and promises of development to attract voters during the election campaign.	126 (32.5%)	151 (38.9%)	73 (18.8%)	38 (9.8%)	2.94
Candidates appealed to trust, loyalty and continuity in presenting themselves to voters.	119 (30.7%)	158 (40.7%)	71 (18.3%)	40 (10.3%)	2.92
Candidates used anger, fear and dissatisfaction with opponents to influence voters.	111 (28.6%)	149 (38.4%)	83 (21.4%)	45 (11.6%)	2.84
Total					2.90

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 1 shows that respondents generally agreed that affective appeals were used during the 2023 Delta State gubernatorial election. The highest mean score of 2.94 was recorded for the use of hope and promises of development, followed by trust, loyalty and

continuity (2.92). The overall mean of 2.90, which is above the 2.50 decision benchmark, indicates that respondents perceived affective appeals as a noticeable feature of the election campaigns.

Table 2: Voters' Perception of the Affective Politics of the Major Candidates

Voter Perception	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean
Emotional campaign messages influenced my perception of the credibility and trustworthiness of the candidates.	108 (27.8%)	157 (40.5%)	82 (21.1%)	41 (10.6%)	2.86
The emotional appeals used by candidates influenced how I perceived their competence and ability to govern.	101 (26.0%)	154 (39.7%)	88 (22.7%)	45 (11.6%)	2.80
Emotional messages made some candidates appear more suitable for leadership than their opponents.	116 (29.9%)	148 (38.1%)	81 (20.9%)	43 (11.1%)	2.87
Total					2.84

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 2 indicates that affective political messages influenced how respondents perceived the candidates. The statement that emotional campaign messages influenced perceptions of credibility and trustworthiness

recorded a mean of 2.86. The overall mean of 2.84 suggests that respondents generally perceived the emotional dimensions of the campaigns as relevant to their assessment of the candidates.

Table 3: Extent to Which Affective Politics Influenced Voters' Perception of Political Candidates

Influence of Affective Politics	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean
Affective political messages influenced my overall impression of the candidates.	122 (31.4%)	149 (38.4%)	77 (19.8%)	40 (10.3%)	2.91
Emotional appeals influenced my preference for some candidates over others.	109 (28.1%)	151 (38.9%)	84 (21.6%)	44 (11.3%)	2.84
Affective campaign messages influenced my perception of which candidate was more capable of representing the interests of Delta State voters.	113 (29.1%)	153 (39.4%)	79 (20.4%)	43 (11.1%)	2.87
Total					2.87

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 3 indicates that affective politics had a considerable influence on voters' perceptions of political candidates. The overall mean of 2.87, being above the 2.50 benchmark, indicates that affective politics influenced voters' perception of the candidates to a considerable extent.

5.2 Discussion of Findings

The findings revealed that the major political parties and candidates employed various affective appeals, particularly hope, trust, fear, anger, pride and resentment, during the 2023 Delta State gubernatorial election. This indicated that political communication during the election went beyond the presentation of policies and programmes to include deliberate attempts to generate emotional responses among voters. The finding supports Omilusi (2021), who observes that emotional appeals have become an important component of political communication in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. It also agrees with Arowolo (2023), who argues that emotion-driven politics has become increasingly significant in Nigerian elections because political actors use emotions to create attachment to their candidates and opposition towards their

competitors. From the perspective of Emotional Contagion Theory, emotions expressed by political actors can be transmitted to audiences, particularly when such emotions are repeatedly communicated through rallies, speeches, traditional media and social media. Asemah, Nwammuo & Nkwam-Uwaoma (2017) note that communication can influence the feelings, attitudes and behaviour of audiences, while Asemah (2011) emphasises the role of mass media in shaping how audiences interpret political issues. The finding is also consistent with Oloruntoba & Falola (2020), who established the importance of anger and insecurity in Nigerian political mobilisation, and Nwadiuto (2025), who found that negative political advertising can shape voter perceptions through unfavourable representations of political opponents. Thus, the emotional appeals identified in the study demonstrate that affective communication was an important feature of the 2023 Delta State gubernatorial contest.

The findings also established that affective politics influenced voters' perception of political candidates during the 2023 Delta State gubernatorial election. This finding

reinforces the central proposition of Emotional Contagion Theory that emotions can spread through social interaction and mediated communication and subsequently influence collective attitudes. When political messages repeatedly associated a candidate with hope, competence, trust or stability, such emotional associations could become attached to the candidate, while repeated exposure to messages portraying an opponent through anger, fear or resentment could contribute to negative perceptions. The finding agrees with Omilusi (2021) and Arowolo (2023) on the importance of emotional appeals in Nigerian electoral communication. It also supports Babalola (2024) who found that political campaigns in Nigeria largely relied on emotional and regional appeals, reinforcing affective loyalty rather than policy conviction. Furthermore, Olawale (2023) demonstrates that social media amplified affective politics during the 2023 elections by enabling emotional messages, slogans and political narratives to circulate rapidly among citizens. In the Delta State context, the finding is also consistent with Ojie (2019) on the significance of party dominance and political networks, as well as Okocha (2018) on zoning and political rotation. Overall, the finding demonstrates that voter perception during the election was influenced not only by rational considerations such as policies and candidate qualifications but also by the emotions generated through political communication.

6.0 CONCLUSION

The study concluded that affective politics was an important factor that shaped voter perception of political candidates during the 2023 Delta State gubernatorial election. The

major political parties and candidates employed both positive and negative emotional appeals, while voters recognised and responded to these appeals in forming impressions of the candidates. Emotions such as hope, trust, pride, fear, anger and resentment contributed to how candidates were perceived in terms of credibility, competence, trustworthiness and suitability for leadership

6.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

Resulting from the findings, it is recommended that:

1. Political parties and candidates should use constructive emotions such as hope, trust and unity to communicate their programmes rather than relying excessively on fear, anger, resentment or messages that portray opponents negatively.
2. Journalists and media organisations should scrutinise emotionally charged campaign claims and avoid amplifying messages capable of promoting ethnic division or political hostility.
3. INEC, civil society organisations and other relevant bodies should educate voters on how political actors use emotional appeals to influence perceptions.

REFERENCES

- Adebanwi, W. (2017). *Nation as grand narrative: The Nigerian press and the politics of meaning*. Rochester: University of Rochester press.
- Agbaje, A. (2020). Electoral politics in Nigeria: Continuity and change in the Fourth Republic. *African Studies Review*, 63(4), 714-735.
- Agbim, K. C., Etumnu, E. W. & Iredibia, K.

- U. (2023). The Obidient movement on Twitter and 2023 general election in Nigeria: An extrapolative analysis. *IMSU Journal of communication Studies*, 7(i), 347-358.
- Akinfeleye, R. A. (2017). Media and elections in Nigeria: challenges of professionalism. *Journal of Communication and Media Research*, 9(2), 19-33.
- Akinfeleye, R. A., & Ojebuyi, B. R. (2021). Social media, political participation and emotional mobilisation in Nigerian elections. *Journal of African Media Studies*, 13(1), 75-92.
- Arijeniwa, A. F., & Nwaoboli, E. P. (2023). Setting agenda for public discourse: Examining the impact of social media on political participation amongst Nigerian youths. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Approach and Studies*, 10(1), 36-53.
- Arowolo, D. (2023). The dynamics of emotion-driven politics in Nigeria. *Journal of African Politics*, 10(2), 123-140.
- Asemah, E. S. (2011). *Selected mass media themes*. Jos: Jos University Press.
- Asemah, E. S., Nwammuo, A. N., & Nkwam-Uwaoma, A. O. A. (2017). *Theories and models of communication*. Jos: Jos University Press.
- Babalola, D. (2024). Party politics, dearth of political ideology, and the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International affairs* 113(5), 434-450. <https://doi.org/10.1080/100358533.2024.2410544>.
- Boler, M., & Davis, E. (2020). *Affective politics of digital media*. Routledge.
- British Broadcasting Corporation. (February 26, 2019). Nigeria election 2019: How youth shaped the vote. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com>
- Chouliaraki, L. (2021). Victimhood: The affective politics of vulnerability. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 24(1), 10-27.
- Harteveld, E., Mendoza, P., & Rooduijn, M. (2022). Affective polarisation and the populist radical right: Creating the hating? *Government and Opposition*, 57(4), 703-727.
- Huddy, L., Mason, L. & Aaroe, L. (2015). Expressive partisanship: campaign involvement, political emotion and partisan identity. *American Political Science Review*, 109(1), 1-17.
- Human Right Watch (HRW) (2011). Nigeria post-election violence killed 800. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org>
- Human Right Watch (June 10, 2019). *Nigeria: Widespread violence ushers president's new term*. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/06/10/Nigeria-widespread-violence-ushers-presidents-new-term>.
- Ibrahim, J. & Hassan, I. (2015). Politics of sympathy: Goodluck Jonathan and the 2011 Nigerian elections. *African Journal of Political Science*, 14(1), 1-22.
- Ibrahim, J. (2023). The Obidient movement and youth political mobilisation in Nigeria's 2023 presidential election. *African Affairs*, 122(488), 543-560.
- Ide, T. & Lind, J. (2018). Environmental degradation and mobilisation in the Niger Delta State: A sociopolitical analysis. *Journal of African Development*, 20(2), 45-65

- Idowu, A. A. & Iyabode, A. S. (2024). Voting pattern and voting behaviour in 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria: A cursory prognosis. *Journal of Administrative Science*, 21(1), 95-126.
- Independent National Electoral Commission (2023). Final list of candidates for state elections(governorship and houses of assembly). Retrieved from <https://www.inecnigeria.org>
- Lee, S., Rojas, H., & Yamamoto, M. (2022). Social media, messaging apps, and affective polarisation in the United States and Japan. *Mass Communication and Society*, 25(5), 673– 697.
- Marchal, N. (2022). “Be nice or leave me alone”: An intergroup perspective on affective polarisation in online political discussions. *Communication Research*, 49(3), 376-398.
- Marcus, G. E., Newman, W. R., & Mackuen, M. (2000). *Affective intelligence and political judgement*. University of Chicago Press.
- Nwaoboli, E. P., Ogunyemi, E. O., & Ezegwu, D. T. (2023). Semiotic analysis of visual propaganda and emotional appeals in MTN's *No be Juju be that* advertising campaign. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Approach and Studies*, 10(4), 241–254.
- Nwaoboli, E. P., Uchenunu, A. O., & Asemah, E. S. (2024a). Gender differences in perception of social media rhetorical devices employed by candidates in the 2023 presidential election among electorate in Benin City, Nigeria. *Ebonyi State University Journal of Mass Communication*, 11(1), 53–66. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13984469>
- Nwaoboli, E. P., Uchenunu, A. O., & Asemah, E. S. (2024b). Perception of the rhetorical strategies of select party flag bearers on social media during the 2023 Nigerian presidential election campaigns. *GVU Journal of Research and Development*, 1(2), 1–16.
- Nwaoboli, E. P., Uchenunu, A. O., & Asemah, E. S. (2024c). Comparative rhetorical analysis of Peter Obi and Bola Ahmed Tinubu's social media campaigns in the 2023 Nigerian presidential election. *COMMICAST*, 5(3), 125–145.
- Nwadiuto, C. N. J. (2025). Poisoning the well: Negative political advertising and the shaping of voter perception in Nigeria's 2023 election. *Mdooter Journal of Communication and Digital Technologies*, 2(2), 14–22.
- Nwoka, A., Amadi, F., Nsereka, B. G., & Itieke-Idamieba, H. (2024). Exposure to political news and its influence on voters' choice of candidates during the 2023 presidential election in Rivers State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Sub-Saharan African Research*, 2(4), 210–223.
- Ojebuyi, B. R., & Salawu, A. (2023). Social media use, political communication and voter engagement in Nigeria's 2023 general elections. *Nigeria Journal of Communications*, 20(1), 45–62.
- Ojie, A. E. (2019). Party dominance and democratic consolidation: The case of Delta State politics. *Nigerian Journal of Political Science*, 17(2), 145-162.
- Okocha, C. (2018). Political zoning and power rotation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. *Journal of African Elections*, 17(1), 92-109.
- Okonta, I. (2019). Ethnic identity and political mobilisation in Delta State. *Niger*

- Delta Studies Journal*, 5(1), 22-38.
- Olawale, I. (2023). Social media, affective politics and Nigeria's 2023 elections: The rise of the Obidients. *African Politics Review*, 9(2), 77-95.
- Oloruntoba, S., & Falola, T. (2020). Anger, insecurity and the 2015 Nigerian presidential election. *African Studies Review*, 63(3), 456-472.
- Omilusi, M. (2021). Emotional appeals and political communication in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. *Nigerian Journal of Political Science*, 15(2), 45-60.
- Omotola, J. S. (2010). Elections and democratic transaction in Nigeria under the Fourth Republic. *African affairs*, 109 (437), 535-553.
- Omotola, J. S. (2021). Intra-party conflicts and democratic consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, 15(3), 112-123.
- Opone, P. O. & Ikuni, D. O. (2024). Godfatherism and Nigeria's 2023 general elections: The case of Delta State. *NIU Journal of Humanities*, 9(1), 147-154.
- Resnick, D. (2019). The politics of information and the media in African elections. *Democratisation*, 26(3), 377-394.
- Sommie, S. D. & Egobueze, A. (2021). Electoral violence and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. An assessment of the general elections in River State, 2011-2019. *Africa political Science Review*, 13(1), 1-24.
- Suberu, R. T. (2015). Electoral Governance and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria. *Journal of Contemporary African studies*, 33(2), 193-213.
- Tornberg, P., Anderson, C., Lindgren, K. & Banisch, S. (2021). Modeling the emergence of affective polarisation in the social media society. *PLoS ONE*, 16(10), e0258259.
- Valentino, N. A., Brader, T., Groenendyk, E. W., Gregorowicz, K., & Hutchings, V. L. (2011). Election night's alright for fighting: The role of emotions in political participation. *The Journal of Politics*, 73(1), 156-170.
- Vanguard Newspaper*. (January 21, 2023). APC campaign in Delta now a liberation movement, say Omo-Agege, Sobotie. Retrieved from <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/01/apc-campaign-in-delta-now-a-liberation-movement-say-omo-agege-sobotie>.