

# Evaluation of the Public Relations Strategies Adopted by Candidates of Select Political Parties during the 2023 Presidential Elections in Nigeria



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## **Abstract**

This study "Evaluation of the Public Relations Strategies Adopted by Candidates of Select Political Parties During the 2023 Presidential Elections in Nigeria", examined the use of public relations strategies by presidential candidates of select political parties for political campaigns in Nigeria. A survey method was adopted for the study. A sample size of 400 was determined using the Taro Yamane formula. Three hundred and ninety-seven (397) copies of the questionnaire were completed and returned. Findings revealed that news reports/feature articles in newspapers and magazines, radio and television programmes, community relations, media relations, advertisements on various media, social media platforms display of posters, billboards, handbills banners, Town hall meetings, interpersonal communication, forum discussions, consultations on Stakeholders, visits to communities to talk to voters, sharing of food items, money, and clothes. Press conferences, releases, statements, media chat/parley by the political candidates and spoke persons, campaign rallies & tours, public lectures, symposia, gifts, and donations were the public relations strategies used by APC, PDP & LP during the 2023 Presidential Elections in Nigeria. It was found that the public relations strategies adopted for campaigns during the 2023 Nigeria presidential elections were highly effective in shaping public opinion and influencing voter behavior. This result implies that to a great extent, the public relations of the three major parties deployed good public relations strategies by exploring proactive steps which proves to be proactive. This shows how important and relevant public relations strategies are when properly applied to political campaigns especially presidential campaigns in Nigeria. Therefore, based on the findings, this paper concluded that the public relations strategies adopted for political campaigns were effective and have led to vast awareness and acceptance of the candidature of presidential candidates during the 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria. It was recommended that to enhance the adoption of public relations strategies, political public relations officers and presidential campaign organizations should employ a multi-

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faceted approach. This includes; Building media Lists, utilize contact database software to build a comprehensive list of media contacts, segmented by outlet, geographic location, and focus area. Media outreach should be embarked upon, online newsrooms should be on the campaign website to centralize information, press releases, and multimedia content for easy access by media contacts. Strategic framing employs framing techniques to shape public discourse and influence public opinion, crisis communication, digital media, relationship management, and government collaboration. Foster partnerships with government agencies, such as ministries of information, National Orientation Agency, and NGOs, to amplify campaign messages and promote national interests. By adopting these strategies, political public relations officers and presidential campaign organizations can effectively manage their public image, communicate their message, and build support among voters.

**Keywords:** *Public Relations Strategies, campaigns, presidential Candidates, Political Parties and Presidential Elections*

### **Introduction**

Elections play a significant role in deepening democracy in many parts of the world in the sense that they enable the governed to decide who governs them. However, an election is not just an event, it is, more importantly, a process involving a multiplicity of activities and stakeholders. Campaigns are one of these essential activities. They play an important role in the catalytic relationship between elections, candidates, and voters (Thurber, 2004). It enables candidates to motivate people to vote for them based on the values and issues they present for consideration. Thus, campaign strategies are an important element in discussions about electoral democracy.

Baines (2003) posited that political parties are becoming more organized in their campaigning activity. In fact, in the UK, the major political parties are starting to embrace public relations and marketing concepts and processes in political campaigns. Political parties are faced with managing several challenges in trying to ensure that their candidates win elections successfully. These challenges include but are not limited to finance, crisis management, media relations, information management, corporate image, and reputation management, attitude and opinion management, event management, protocol functions, community relations, employee relations, corporate advertising, audio-visual productions, public enlightenment, corporate identity management, issues management, government relations, competitors' relations, and corporate social responsibility (Nwosu, 2005).

The history of electioneering in Nigeria is eventful. Right from 1959 general elections campaigns and elections haven been replete with chaos and vindictiveness (Igweobi, 2006). The issue of elections in Nigeria (Igweobi, 2006), "is the case of preparation to face not only challenges of convincing voters but also how to stay alive and see the results when announced". He further observed, that killings and maiming are so much during elections and have so discouraged many genuine people from venturing into politics. In planning a full course of action for a politician to gain political advantage among the electorate and political opinion leaders, efforts should be made to tackle the challenges mentioned above using public relations strategies, policies, tools, etc.

The activities of the Public Relations of political parties are enormous, they include; Publications e.g. Official Bulletins, Newsletters, Announcements, Press Releases, Convocation and Ceremonial Cards, Programme Booklets, Annual Calendars, Diaries,

Plagues, political parties Inscribed Souvenirs and imprints; prepare and coordinate protocol lists. Arrange Protocol Order at functions and anchor functions as Master of Ceremony; Maintain Visitors Register; Serve as first port-of-call for visitors, serve as clearing house of official information, circulars, and policies; Undertake content analysis of media reports on the political parties. Prepare newspaper cuttings etc. Offer strategic advice to the chairman on official matters that could negatively affect or are likely to so affect the political parties; Gauge public opinions on the political parties and prepare a strategy to foster understanding and favorable perception of the political parties, handle political parties based on the request on electronics (i.e. Principal Officers and members)e.g. TV sets, Media, Cameras, Satellite decoders, and telecommunications connections, Undertake Annual distribution of Hospitality to important Officers and community leaders (e.g BOT, Members, Emirs and Chiefs, party chieftains and Others); Publication: i. Quarterly Official Bulletin ii. Newsletters iii. Publish political party-wide documents such as party briefs, University Calendar of Events, party fliers and handbooks, Annual Calendars, Adverts Placements, etc.

However, in 21<sup>st</sup> Century political organizations have adopted professional public relations activities owing to rapid expansion of its environments, the increase in members' population and the changing social issues that they deal with both internally and externally. Owing to this expansion, communication effectiveness has also become a hard task for most political parties in dealing with an audience (Aikins & Adu-Oppong, 2015). This suggests that there is a need to look for effective ways of sharing information with the public in particular. Therefore, new and more innovative ways of facilitating communication between the political parties and their public must be sought in this era of dynamic and rapid changes. In Nigeria, although political organisations have public relations departments and units, they have not been given the same status as other sections.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The target, aims, and objectives of every political party/ political candidate is to have victory at the poll. In a bid to achieve this feat, public relations tools and strategies must be employed by political parties in the area of ensuring, maintaining, and sustaining mutual respect, mutual recognition, mutual understanding, mutual relation, and building goodwill between a political party and its various publics. Therefore, political parties face the following problems in their campaign programmes. Campaign research; campaign planning, budgeting, fundraising, rally, advertising, identity management, media relations, image and reputation management etc. campaign implementation and campaign evaluation.

The All Progressives Congress (APC), Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), and Labour Party (LP) adopted public relations strategies for their campaigns ahead of the February 25th, 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria. The questions are: Which public relations strategies were adopted by the three political parties' candidates for campaigns? Were the public relations strategies adopted by the political parties' candidates effective?

Therefore, on this premise, this study assessed the public relations strategies adopted by the presidential candidates of the All Progressives Congress (APC-Ahmed Bola Tinibu), the Peoples's Democratic Party (PDP-Alhaji Atiku Abubakar), and the Labour Party (LP-Mr Peter Gregory Obi) during the February 25th 2023 Presidential Election campaigns of Nigeria.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The general aim of this study is to assess the political campaign strategies adopted by select candidates during the February 25th, 2023 Presidential Elections in Nigeria. However, the specific objectives are:

1. To find out the public relations strategies adopted by presidential candidates of the select political parties during the 2023 Presidential Elections in Nigeria
2. To ascertain the effectiveness of the public relations strategies adopted by presidential candidates of the select political parties during the 2023 Presidential Campaigns in Nigeria
3. To investigate the challenges faced in applying each of the public relations strategies adopted by the presidential candidates of the select political parties during the 2023 Presidential Campaigns in Nigeria.

### **Conceptual Clarifications:**

#### **a. Public Relations**

Public relations is about presenting yourself, your organization, and your product in a favourable light to your various publics' based on the full truth. It is about getting them to hear of you if they haven't heard of you before and giving them a good impression of you. Today's business world is, therefore, highly competitive, and every firm or political organization does things not neglecting the actions and reactions of its competitors and other interest groups around. It is therefore not a good strategy for an organization or political association to make a good "product or candidate" and it feels that it can market it properly when it has a bad image and relationship in the public understanding.

Public relations is, therefore, the business of getting and maintaining public understanding and support. It is a management function, which attempts to create goodwill for an organization and its products or candidates. Hence, the need for the use of public relations strategies and practices to be adopted in political public relations management in Nigeria. The political parties have a great interest in developing mutual and beneficial relationships with interest group publics because they rely on key publics such as area/policy experts, think-tank organizations, and civil society organizations to collect information and positions on diverse policy issues to draft proposals. It is a mutual and beneficial relationship.

Finally, the importance of political public relations in the political sphere of Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. It is highly imperative for the overall success of any political party that wishes to win an election or maintain political leadership in Nigeria.

#### **b. Public Relations Strategies**

Campaigning was largely about reinforcing partisanship and mobilizing the committed. But nowadays, this is no more the case, people are more enlightened, they have realized their importance in the current democratic setting and need to be persuaded and convinced to part with their votes. And this has stimulated the development of political public relations. Therefore, for a political party to win the support of voters, it must adopt some of these varying public relations strategies as a multi-disciplinary field of study.

It was Downs in Achumba (2004) who, writing from an economic standpoint, was one of the first to apply the logic of marketing to politics and democracy. He posited that

voters and politicians were economic or market rationalists. In this view, voters were like consumers seeking the best buy, and politicians who campaigned for votes were businessmen who sought sales. Strategy is the direction that the organization chooses to follow to fulfill its mission. This means that public relations strategy is the overall approach that is taken to a programme or campaign of an organization to move them from where they are to where they want to be. Tactics on the other hand are devices for accomplishing an end. They are the things you will do to accomplish the goal, meet the objective, and fulfill the strategy. Techniques are public relations devices or actions taken to achieve the business or the organization's objective(s). Therefore, public relations techniques in political parties are speeches, special events, newsletters, annual reports, and news releases.

**c. Public Relations Tools Employed as Strategies for Political Campaign**

Public relations practitioners use various tools to achieve political campaign goals. These tools include but are not limited to the following:

1. **Press Release:** This is a very vital tool used by public relations managers in reaching their public through the media. According to Eze (2010, p.62) as an instrument of public relations, the information disseminated must be of interest and value to the electorate who must gain something from it. As a matter of policy, the party in her electioneering campaign is to give the press the main points it wants to disseminate and if the press finds the content newsworthy for their radio and television broadcasts, it will be used.
2. **Feature/Articles:** The public relations practitioner can also inform, educate, and entertain the target audience during electioneering campaigns by writing features or articles to the press for onward dissemination to the public. According to Nkwazema (2001, p.52), the editor determines the format, size, and number of words as it should be well edited by the publishing media to create the necessary impact.
3. **Press Conference/Briefing:** The public relations officer invites and organizes members of the press to give background information about developments during the electioneering campaign. Accordingly, in the event of the outbreak of any harmful news, the press will be able to write authoritatively on the issue. The journalists are also given the free hand to ask questions on the issues considered relevant during the electioneering campaign (Edeani 2003, p.11).
4. **Political Rallies:** In classical Greek democracies, the sophists applied rational analysis to the magic of language to explain what was persuasive in deliberative assemblies. They were the ones who showed how rhythm, pattern, and metaphor engaged the audience and how assonance and antithesis establish a persuasive dynamic in both the sound and sense of the words, Barret (Achumba, 2004, p. 9). Political rallies offer the party and its candidates the opportunity of face-to-face encounters with the electorate (Okafor, 2003, p.17). At the event of rallies, the party leaders present the contesting candidate to the voters. Encomiums are poured on him to project the candidate's image and create a good impression about him to the electorate.
5. **Gifts and Donations:** These are tools often used by public relations practitioners in managing a political campaign. The political parties and politicians are encouraged

to generate goodwill and win the support of the electorate during the electioneering campaign by offering electorate gift items, especially to the poor, for example, T-shirts, key-holders, umbrellas, diaries, litter bins, calendars, etc. During electioneering campaigns contesting candidates appear in public during special occasions like the launching of funds for community projects, charitable organizations, women's organizations, etc, and pledge financial and or material assistance to the organizers (Ejiogu, 2003, p. 19)

6. **Publicity:** Publicity is the tool of mass communication which can be defined as the generation of news about a person, product, or service that appears in broadcast or print media (Doug & Hanson, 2003).

### **An Overview of Presidential Political Campaigns in Nigeria**

Political campaign is an organized effort by a political party or candidate for public office to attract the support of voters in an election (Ginsberg, 2020). It can also be defined as an organized effort which seeks to influence the decision making process within a specific group. In democracies, political campaigns often refer to electoral campaigns, wherein representatives are chosen or referendums are decided. Political campaigns also include organized efforts to alter policy within any institution or organization. The political campaign is defined by theorists, as the rush of media items leading up to polling day.

Campaigns are multi-disciplinary entities that are of interest to and draw methods from marketing, political science, media theory, and many other disciplines as well. Political campaigns originated because the political function of language is embedded deeply in the evolution of human society. The survival of the tribe depended not only on a shared language but also on its use to arrive at timely decisions. For example, the techniques of constructing compelling stories and memorable songs using rhythm, assonance, alliteration, and play to infuse words with tilt, balance, tone, and deeper meaning, were the bases of practical magic.

Sambe (2010) affirms that public relations in political circles and justifies it for two reasons. First, in any democratic process, political parties and individual politicians must necessarily seek support from the public. Secondly, to sustain political party prices citizen participation and voter support are required to win results for the party. The author finally concluded by identifying the objectives for planned and continuing public relations programs in partisan politics thus:

- i. To overcome apathy and speculation towards party policies and activities and the functions of the political party in the polity.
- ii. To provide reliable information for the voters seeking to make an intelligent decision at the polls.
- iii. To crystallize public sentiment and pave the way for non-coercive compliance. This requires persuading the citizen of the need to understand the direction and programmes of the party.

Sambe (2010) undertook a study into the role public relations could play in party policies and postulates that public relations can be beneficial to political parties in many ways. These include among others, implementing party politics, media relations, and reporting to the public, the activities, and policies of the political group, as well as increasing the party's sensitivity to its public.

Furthermore, the public relations roles in politicking must create no room for suspicion in any of the political party or candidate's dealing with the public. Heading all issues with professional care could do and to ensure this, Osuji (2012) posited further that communicating with the right people at the right place, with the correct message is the essence of a public relations game plan in political activities. This can at the same time serve as an "antidote in vanquishing and restraining rumor". And other problems that may place the party or candidate at a disadvantage.

Osuji (2012) also sees the credibility of public relations in the political setting. Public relations being a management activity then has the responsibility to evolve strategic planning for the conduct of the democratic process to ensure its successful entrance and exit. Planning badly by those seeking election and indeed the whole democratic process leads to chaos, conflict, failure, distrust, secrecy, and corruption, public relations strategies ensure that with every difficulty notwithstanding planners must know the modalities and work towards their implementation of successful execution.

Odigbo (2013) opines that public relations roles in political campaigns are mainly concerned with the promotion of general mutual understanding, cooperation, and healthy relationships between a political party or a politician and their diverse public. It, therefore, wins the goodwill, acceptance, and support of their diverse public for their views, opinions, policies, programmes, and projects, tempers acrimonies, and keeps unhealthy oppositions at bay. He further listed the following public relations roles in political campaigns.

1. Issues monitoring and trend analyses of everything likely to impact either positively or negatively on the client(s) and mapping out strategic plans to take advantage of the positive ones, while nipping the negative ones in the bud.
2. Carrying out planned public education and enlightenment programmes aimed at disseminating relevant information on political party policies, programmes and projects.
3. Make concerted professional efforts to correct the misperceptions, misinformation, disinformation, prejudices, and biases against political parties or politicians.
4. Daily mass auditing, to discover areas of negative press and fashion out public relations initiatives to correct them, while strengthening or consolidating on the areas of positive press.
5. Counseling on, building, and maintaining a positive public image, reputation, and conduct on the political party or politician.
6. Ensuring effective two-way communication mechanisms between the political party or politician and the public.
7. Wining public goodwill, acceptance, cooperation, and support for the political party's views, policies, programmes, and projects.
8. Influencing and ensuring at all times mutual understanding and a more harmonious relationship between the party or politician and their public.
9. Ensuring that the political party or politician keeps alive to his social responsibility obligations to the public, to be positioned in the public mind as a good 'father', 'brother', 'servant' or 'political citizen'.

Moreover, Ugbaja (2011) sees the essence of public relations in electioneering campaigns as building up and maintaining clear lines of communication between the political party,

candidates, and the electorate as well as confidence in the candidates. This implies that political parties and their candidates should operate on the concept of image management by trying to endear themselves in the minds of the electorate. Thus, political parties must perceive public relations as a social philosophy which according to Okafor (2003, p. 15) assigns pride of place to the needs and well-being of the electorate with the understanding that when first consideration is given to the interests of the electorate in this way, the party's interest will ultimately and satisfactorily be served.

In agreement with this opinion, Okafor (2013) states that one way through which a political party can maintain mutual understanding with the electorate is effective communication between the political party and such electorate. The importance of effective communication is to keep the electorates fully informed about their manifestoes or programmes of services for the welfare of the electorate and tries to market this programmes to them. In doing this, the party tries to highlight the strengths and qualities of its candidates to convince the electorate.

Again, Edeani in Igweobi (2006, p. 16), states that public relations activities could influence the formation of public opinion about political parties and their candidates. In this case, he reasons that public relations policies programmes and activities should be formulated and executed in such a manner that they contribute to the formation of favourable opinions toward the party and its candidates. Odetoyinbo (2009, p. 71), it is expected therefore, that political parties should always seize the opportunities avail them by their statutory function of political education to really identify, study and create avenues for goodwill and mutual understanding with the electorate. They need to inform, enlighten, and educate the electorate and other political parties about their ideologies and manifestoes.

### **Review of Empirical Studies**

Some selected relevant related empirical works were reviewed to enrich and support the current study, they include:

Kehinde, Olusola, Angie & Solarin, (2016) conducted a study titled "Rally as a Political Public Relations Strategy for Public Acceptance of a Political Party: A Focus on APC Presidential Campaign in Lagos State". This study examines the assessment of the use of rallies as a political public relations strategy for public acceptance of a political party during the 2015 Presidential elections in Lagos State. survey method was adopted for the study. Public relations use tactical methods of communication to build relations between an organisation and its internal and external public. The survey method was used as the research design in carrying out this study and the research instrument used was the questionnaire as well as the interview schedule to consolidate the analysis which was carried out. It is interesting to note that 95% of respondents are aware of political rallies being used during elections while 56% of these respondents participated in these political rallies. The findings revealed that political rally is an effective factor that shapes electorates' attitudes and their choice of candidate. The researchers therefore recommend that electorates should not depend on political rallies alone in making their decisions on who they should vote for during elections. Electorates should not rely on information obtained from one source, but should also seek other sources for more information and a better understanding towards accepting a political party and its candidate. Both studies are similar in their methodology adopted. Both studies are on electioneering in Nigeria.

Both studies differ in terms of time, geographical differences, and population. These are the gaps the current study closed.

In another study, Ojekwe (2021) conducted titled “political advert campaigns and voting behaviour: a study of Akinwunmi Ambode’s election advert campaigns in Lagos State”. In recent times, the use of political advert campaigns has become increasingly popular; this was evident in the just concluded 2015 gubernatorial elections in Lagos State. This paper specifically examined political ad campaigns of the All Progressive Congress (APC) gubernatorial candidate in Lagos State, Akinwunmi Amobde. a field survey of eligible voters in Lagos State was carried out to further ascertain the efficacy of political ad campaigns on the electorates. From the field survey, results were collated, analyzed, and summarized using simple frequency tables. Findings from the study showed that political ad campaigns have a minimal effect on the electorate’s voting behaviour but still play a role in the electoral process. This study recommended that political candidates and parties should concentrate on other election campaign strategies and for further studies to be carried out to better understand other existing factors that influence voting behaviour. However, there exist geographical and population gaps in the study. These are the gaps the current study closed.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on the Democratic Participant Theory.

#### **Democratic Participant Theory**

As one of the normative theories of the press, it is an alternative politics-media ideology that aims to democratize access to the media in challenging the monopolistic tendencies of the powerful political and economic forces operating in society. The emergence of the theory is motivated by discontentment with the libertarian media theory or free press and the social responsibility theory. Such discontentment arose because they failed to achieve the social benefit anticipated for them. The two theories have also failed to stem the increasing tide of commercialization and monopolization of privately owned media. They have also been unable to prevent the centralization and democratization of public broadcasting institutions even when they have been founded according to social responsibility norms (Uzochukwu & Ekwugha, 2014).

The democratic participant theory thus represents a radical effort to neutralize all sorts of monopoly in media gatekeeping, therefore accommodating popular participation as represented by the diverse societal interests like students, labour, political parties, gender groups, and religious bodies, among others. The theory is a direct answer to the emergency of “monopoly journalism as a result of extreme commercialization of the media in a developed world (Okunna, 1999). Okunna comments further as follows: the private media have become increasingly concentrated in the hands of fewer and fewer individual owners or ownership syndicates. Thus, despite the existence of pluralism (as also advocated by the liberation theory, the mass media voices that are available tend to speak with one voice because many media outlets may belong to the same owner or ownership syndicates (Okunna, 1999,p.122)

Daramola (2003) writes that the democratic participant theory “advocates” pluralism as against monopolization and decentralization as against centralism... It also suggests horizontal as against up-to-down communication. It stresses its commitment to feedback in the socio-political communication circuit... This theory has been described as the press

equivalent of "grassroots democracy". The theory also advocates equality between sender and receiver or what has been called association mode as against the command mode or superiority of the sender to the receiver in a one-way communication system. The theory equally observed that given the fact that the mass media has become too important socially, it should not be left in the hands of the professionals. This theory has been described as the press equivalent of grassroots democracy.

Applied to the subject of this study, the democratic participant theory helps to conceptualize the political parties' public relations use of mass media, new media, and other tools as platforms for popular democratic participation where the common people excluded from the bureaucracy permitted traditional media would have opportunity to make their contribution to governance. The new media, by its dynamics, naturally lends itself to popular participation.

### Methodology

The survey method was used to carry out this study. A simple random sampling technique was adopted to select respondents.

The population of this study constitutes people within the voting age in the three selected states and FCT, specifically three states and FCT in North Central form the population of this study. They are Nasarawa State, Plateau State, Benue State and FCT. These places were selected to cover the entire North Central States. The respondents are residents of the four places. This means that the population of the study shall be the entire population of the three states and FCT. The population of Nasarawa State is 2,632,239; Plateau State 4,400,974; Benue 5,787,706; and FCT Abuja 2,702,443.

The total population of the four places put together is fifteen million five hundred thousand and twenty-three thousand three hundred and sixty-two people (15,523,362) people. (*National Populations Commissions 2022*).

Four hundred (400) copies of questionnaires were administered to respondents who were part of the public relations team of the three political parties' presidential candidates' campaign organization across metropolitan centers in Nasarawa State, FCT, and Plateau. Respondents were selected from Lafia, Abuja Municipal Council, Makurdi metropolis, and Jos Town randomly. A sample size of 400 was determined using Taro Yamane formulae. Out of the 400 questionnaires administered, 397 were completed and returned.

### Data Presentation

**Table 1:** The public relations strategies adopted by presidential candidates of the select political parties during the 2023 Presidential Electioneering in Nigeria

Responses	Frequency	Percentages
Media relations, News reports/ Feature articles in newspapers and magazines, Radio and Television programmes, Community, Advertisements on various media, social media platforms display posters, billboards and handbills banners Town hall meetings, interpersonal communication, forum discussions, consultations with Stakeholders,	120	30.2%

visits to communities to talk to voters, distribution of money, food items clothes,	90	22.7%
Press conferences, releases, statements, Addressed media chat/parley by the political candidates and spoke persons/Campaign PROs, campaign rallies/ tour	15	4.0%
Celebrity endorsement, Organising Special events like public lectures, Symposia, gifts and donations	5	2.0%
All-of-the-Above	167	42.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>397</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Field Survey, 2024

As seen table 1 interrogates the public relations strategies used by select political parties during the 2019 general elections in Nigeria, 167 (42.1%) of the respondents affirmed all the above. 120 (30.2%) of respondents affirm News reports/Feature articles in newspapers and magazines, Radio and Television programmes, Community, Relations, Media Relations, Advertisements on various media, social media platforms display of posters, billboards, handbills banners, while 90 (22.7%) of the respondents opined Town hall meetings, interpersonal communication, forum discussions, consultations on Stakeholders, visits to communities to talk to voters, distribution of money, food items clothes. And 20 (5.1%) of the respondents said Press conferences, releases, statements, media chat/parley by the political candidates and spoke persons/Campaign PROs campaign rallies/tours. On the other hand, no respondents said Organising Special events like public lectures, Symposia, gifts, and donations were the public relations strategies used by APC, PDP & LP during the 2023 Presidential Elections in Nigeria.

This translates to the conclusion that the public relations of APC, PDP & LP explored all available public relations strategies they know during the 2023 Presidential Elections in Nigeria in order to win elections.

**Table 2:** The public relations strategies adopted by presidential candidates during the 2023 Nigerian presidential elections were effective in shaping public opinion and influencing voter behavior.

Responses	Frequency	Percentages
Agree very Strongly	120	30.2%
Agree Strongly	167	42.1%
Agree	90	22.7%
Disagree	20	5.1%
Disagree very Strongly	0	0.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>397</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 9 indicates the public relations strategies adopted by presidential candidates during the 2023 Nigerian presidential elections were highly effective in shaping public opinion and influencing voter behavior, 120 (30.2%) of the respondents agreed very strongly, 167 (42.7%) strongly agreed, while 90 (22.7%) of the respondents Agreed. And 20 (5.1%) of the respondents disagreed respectively.

This translates to the conclusion that the public relations strategies adopted by presidential candidates during the 2023 Nigerian presidential elections were highly effective in shaping public opinion and influencing voter behavior. This result implies that to a great extent, the public relations of the three major parties deployed good public relations strategies by exploring proactive steps which proves to be proactive.

**Table 3: The challenges faced in applying the public relations strategies adopted by the presidential candidates of the select political parties during the 2023 presidential campaigns in Nigeria**

Responses	Frequency	Percentages
Hate speech on social media	120	30.2%
Inadequate funding for PR team	167	42.1%
Abuses, Attacks Violence	90	22.7%
Lack of freehand for the PR team to perform their functions optimally	20	5.1%
none of the above	0	0.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>397</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 3 indicates the result of the challenges faced in applying the public relations strategies adopted by the presidential candidates of the select political parties during the 2023 presidential campaigns in Nigeria, 120 (30.2%) of the respondents affirmed hate speech on social media, 167 (42.7%) affirmed Inadequate funding for the PR team. This translates to concluding that the public relations strategies adopted by presidential candidates during the 2023 Nigerian's presidential elections would have been more effective if the presidential candidates released adequate funds to the public relations team of their presidential campaign to organisation of the various political parties.

### Discussion of Findings

Based on the objectives of the study. The study arrived at three key findings discussed below:

Findings further revealed that the three parties (APC, PDP, and LP) deployed public relations strategies to win voters' support, with a focus on social media engagement, targeted messaging, policy speeches, grassroots mobilization, and influencer partnerships. The political parties and presidential candidates during the 2023 presidential electioneering used public relations strategies as tools for winning voters' support during the 2023 presidential campaigns in Nigeria. Igweobi (2006, p. 16), states that public relations activities could influence the formation of public opinion about political parties and their candidates. In this case, he reasons that public relations policies

programmes, and activities should be formulated and executed in such a manner that they contribute to the formation of favourable opinions toward the party and its candidates.

The public relations adopted during the 2023 Nigerian's presidential elections were highly effective in shaping public opinion and influencing voter behavior. The implication of this result is that to a great extent the public relations of the three major parties deployed good public relations strategies by exploring proactive steps which proves to be proactive. This shows how important and relevant public relations strategies are when properly applied to political campaigns especially presidential campaigns in Nigeria. These findings corroborate the position of Osuji (2012) who asserts that the credibility of public relations in a political setting. Public relations being a management activity then has the responsibility to evolve strategic planning for the conduct of the democratic process to ensure its successful entrance and exit. Planning badly by those seeking election and indeed the whole democratic process leads to chaos, conflict, failure, distrust, secrecy, and corruption, public relations strategies ensure that with every difficulty notwithstanding planners must know the modalities and work towards their implementation of successful execution.

Findings show that the challenges faced applying the public relations strategies; hate speech on social media, Abuse; Attacks Violence; inadequate funding for the PR team; and lack of free for the PR team to perform their functions optimally were the key challenges faced by the public relations of the various political parties' presidential candidates' campaign organization during the 2023 presidential campaigns in Nigeria. This overall proves that the application and adoption of public relations strategies for political campaigns fulfilled its purpose of adoption.

### **Conclusion**

Therefore, based on the findings this paper concludes that the public relations strategies adopted for political campaigns were effective and have led to vast acceptance and awareness of the presidential candidates during the 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria. The goal of strategic political communication during elections is to use information and communication as strategically and effectively as possible to reach the objectives that have been set. The strategic goals of parties and campaigns are thus imperative, which suggests that an understanding of strategic political campaigns during presidential elections requires an understanding of political parties' target goals. For example, some parties are more vote-seeking, while others may be more policy-seeking. Such party characteristics will influence both the priority given to campaigning and campaign communication, and how the parties and its presidential candidates plan and run their campaigns.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings and conclusion of this paper, the following four recommendations are hereby proffered:

1. To enhance the adoption of public relations strategies, political public relations officers and presidential campaign organizations should employ a multi-faceted approach. This includes; building media lists and utilizing contact database software to build a comprehensive list of media contacts, segmented by outlet, geographic location, and focus area. Media outreach should be embarked upon, online

newsrooms should be on the campaign website to centralize information, press releases, and multimedia content for easy access by media contacts. Strategic framing employs framing techniques to shape public discourse and influence public opinion, crisis communication, digital media, relationship management, and government collaboration. Foster partnerships with government agencies, such as ministries of information, National Orientation Agency, and NGOs, to amplify campaign messages and promote national interests. By adopting these strategies, political public relations officers and presidential campaign organizations can effectively manage their public image, communicate their message, and build support among voters.

2. Politicians and political parties, as well as their supporters, should be cautioned on using social media to post/tweet negative messages. The government or INEC may consider enacting laws that make such acts punishable offenses.
3. The public relations team of presidential candidates' campaign organisations should be given free hands to function optimally during campaigns.
4. Funds should be voted to the public relations team by presidential candidates adequately to enable them to carry out their duties as expected during campaigns.

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