

Bad News and Voter Apathy in Cameroon

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Abstract

The Cameroonian society is overwhelmed with bad news, which we conjecture as having a negative spillover on electoral participation. Contextually, 2025 is a crucial presidential election year in Cameroon, and participation is largely considered the lifeblood to sustain the country's contested democracy. Over the years, political and civil actors have taken centre stage in the media, calling for voter registration and voting. However, voter apathy has been rising in Cameroon since the 1997 presidential election. This study examines the relationship between bad news reports and voter apathy in Cameroon. Anchored on the Agenda Setting theory, 1285 respondents were surveyed in Buea, Bamenda, Bafoussam, Douala, Yaoundé and Maroua. Findings reveal that most respondents are significantly interested in getting news updates about electoral activities in Cameroon. Respondents also attest that bad news reports overwhelmingly dominate the Cameroon media landscape (59.8%), predominantly focus on negative aspects of issues (56.2%), and reflect the overall state of Cameroon's activities (48.5%). Results equally reveal a positive correlation ($r = 0.2$) between exposure to negative news and voter apathy. This positive correlation, though weak, shows that when bad news reports increase, voter apathy also increases. The weak correlation is due to the influence of other factors responsible for voter apathy, including broken or unfulfilled promises from politicians (78%), lack of trust in electoral institutions (70.6%), vote rigging (67.2%), feeling of detachment from Cameroon's political systems (60.1%), limited political information or education (56.7%), complex voting procedure (53.3%), and the absence of strong opposition parties in the country. We recommend that electoral stakeholders and media practitioners intensify efforts to encourage and educate the public on the importance of voting to enhance voter turnout. Good news should also count (62.6% affirmed this) in media agenda, especially during elections.

Keywords: bad news reports, voter apathy, media influence, elections, voting, Cameroon

1. Introduction

The world is experiencing an intensification of bad news reports (Arango-Kure, Garz & Rott, 2014; Edwards, 2017; Lengauer, Esser, & Berganza, 2012; Zillmann, Chen, Knobloch, & Callison, 2004) and a decline in voter turnout (Gwaibi, 2018; Fame, 2020; Agu, Okeke, & Idike, 2013; Mataka & Nkandu, 2020). Yet, the nexus between bad news reports and voters' apathy remains underexplored in countries like Cameroon. The concept of bad news has been approached from different perspectives. Proctor (2021, p.2) notes that bad news refers to "stories or issues comprising of or relating to the following elements: violence, terrorism, fear, wars/conflicts, illegal/nefarious activity, cybercrime, sexual abuse, famines, disease, the harmful portrayal of groups, shootings, unexpected/unfortunate deaths, and natural disasters." Harcup (2004, p.34) sees it as "stories with negative overtones." This implies that bad news reports evoke negative emotions in recipients. However, these definitions are limited because they focus on the negative aspects of bad news. Ngange, Mesumbe and Nnode (2024) reveal that bad news reports give joy to some individuals. For instance, it brings solace and joy to the defeat of one's political opponent. This dual effect of bad news makes it difficult to have a holistic definition that explains the concept.

Bad news is visible in electoral campaigns. During campaigning, some parties and officials resort to negative campaigning. They tarnish the image of their political opponents through various media outlets. For instance, Hansen

(2010) reveals that political opponents of the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) party tend to use derogatory comments on radio broadcasting to restrain Cameroonians from voting for the party. The news media do not only focus on the negative messages from these political actors, they also adopt a negative tone within the coverage (Jamieson, 1992).

Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995) also assert that the negativity experienced during campaigns decreases turnout, promotes apathy, distrust, and dislike of politics. The more individuals consume negative elements like mutual attacks, criticism among candidates, and conflict (Ansolabehere, Iyengar, Simon, & Valentino, 1994; Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995) during campaigns, the more likely they are to exhibit voting apathy. Contrarily, researchers (Lau & Pomper, 2001, Lau & Pomper, 2004; Clinton & Lapinski, 2004; Mutz & Reeves, 2005; Goldstein & Freedman, 2002) contend that negative advertisement increases mobilisation, voters' attention, and determination to participate in an election. Martin (2008) introduces the social threat mechanism to justify why media coverage of issues negatively will stimulate political participation. The mechanism says that when citizens feel that the government's policies, actions and failures are adversely affecting their personal lives, they rise to criticise the government, demand a change of government and participate in other political activities like elections to oust their administrators from power.

Martin (2008, p. 180) asserts that "political participation is partially conditioned on citizens' perceptions of the state of the country, which are largely informed through mediated channels, specifically newspapers and television news". Lippmann (1922) also acknowledges the power of the media to influence audience perception of the society and their priorities. He notes that, "the news media are a primary source of those pictures in our heads about the larger world of public affairs, a world that for most citizens is out of reach, out of sight, out of mind," (Lippmann, 1922, p. 29). From a neutral stand, Kaufman, Baer, Cole and Sexton (2008) indicate that negative campaigning neither increases nor reduces voters' apathy and de Vreese and Semetko (2004) agreed that negativity does not suppress turnout nor does it hinder mobilisation.

Generally, scholars (Freedman, Franz, & Goldstein, 2004; Martin, 2004) affirm that the news media have continued to provide citizens with both negative and positive information about society, and the information received from the media determines whether or not citizens will participate in political activities like elections.

Participation is the lifeblood of democracy (Franklin, 1996). Massive participation is needed to advance the level of democracy in a fragile economy like Cameroon (Tanjong, 2012). Man is a political being and cannot live in a vacuum (Berker, 1968). As political beings, mankind is expected to get involved in political activities like voting, joining political groups, sharing political messages and opinions and advocating for a political cause (Woodward & Roper, 1956). Unfortunately, electoral participation has been declining in Cameroon since the 1997 presidential election. The 2018 presidential election witnessed a 53.85% voter turnout out of 6, 667,754 registered voters as opposed to a 68.28% voter turnout of 7,251,651 registered voters in the 2011 presidential election, 82.23% voter turnout of 4,657,748 registered voters in the 2004 presidential election and 83.10% voter's turnout out of 4,220,136 registered voters in 1997 presidential election (Nohien, Krennerich & Thibaut, 1999; Fame, 2020).

The decline in turnout in previous presidential elections in Cameroon has led officials of Elections Cameroon (ELECAM) to adopt new strategies to encourage participation. Across regions, officials are posted at various cosmopolitan joints to educate and register potential voters. These efforts are yielding fruit. On April 24, 2025, the South West Regional Delegate of ELECAM, Zofoa Njoya Sake, disclosed that 408,820 people (219,061 men and 159,206 women) had so far been registered in the electoral list. From January 2025 to April 2025, 16,969 potential voters were registered in the South West Region. The number is higher than 9,578 registered within the same period in 2024 (Mbunwe, 2025). In the North West Region, 28,600 individuals out of 26,236 targeted in 2024 were registered (Dingana, 2025). This demonstrates a rise in voter registration ahead of the 2025 presidential election in the nation.

However, voter registration is characterised by uncertainties, rumours, threats and challenges. For instance, the North West Regional Delegate of ELECAM, Mbowoh Elvis, stated that the lack of functional identification posts and insecurity in many parts of the region hinder voter registration (Dingana, 2025). Kindzeka (2024, p.1) equally disclosed that "political opposition and civil society say most qualified voters are reluctant to register because they think President Paul Biya plans to rig elections." The reports further revealed that human rights activists and party officials are encouraging disgruntled youths to "register, vote and come out massively to protest, should their victory be stolen again" (Kindzeka, 2024, p.1). Gwaibi (2018) also remarks that many Cameroonians are hesitant to cast votes during elections because of electoral fraud and an overall feeling that change cannot be possible through the ballot box. This implies that some Cameroonians do not trust the voting system. Nyamnjoh (1999) reinforces that the 1992 electoral malpractices have led some Cameroonians to believe that the electoral system is flawed by corruption and vote buying. This is because of the popular notion that the former chairman of the Social Democratic Front (SDF), Ni John Fru Ndi,

had won the election, but the ruling Cameroon People's Democratic Movement emerged victorious (Nkwi & Socpa, 2011).

Low voter turnout in Cameroon has led organisations like the Network for Solidarity, Empowerment and Transformation for All (NewSETA) to request a reduction in the voting age from 20 to 18 years. In pursuit of this vision, the organisation launched a campaign titled "Vote 18". NewSETA (2019) recounts that a reduction of the voting age would increase electoral participation and promote electoral awareness in Cameroon. They surveyed 200 participants in Yaoundé of whom 74% supported the initiative for a reduction in the minimum voting age. However, a reduction in voting age cannot single-handedly increase voter turnout in the nation. The International Crisis Group (2020) suggests that the government should correct deficiencies in the electoral system that undermined the 2018 elections and outlaw ethnic discrimination. It believes that this adjustment would enhance trust in democratic institutions and promote voter turnout.

1.1 Research Questions

RQ1: To what extent are eligible voters interested in getting electoral information from the news media?

RQ2: To what extent do negative news reports contribute to voter apathy in Cameroon?

1.2 Hypotheses

H1: Eligible voters are significantly interested in getting electoral information from the news media

H2: There is a positive correlation between exposure to negative news reports and voter apathy in Cameroon

This study will help contribute to electoral participation in Cameroon. It uncovers the factors responsible for voter apathy, and this helps to direct the efforts and resources of election officials in addressing the phenomenon in the nation. The research will also enable media audiences to adopt a better approach to news consumption. Often, media audiences are negligent of the negative effects that bad news reports have on their emotions, attitudes and behaviours. So, they go about consuming all sorts of negativities from the media. By unveiling the effects of bad news reports, media audiences can adopt a better approach to news consumption. The findings will equally contribute to academic discourse on the interplay between bad news reports and voting decisions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Bad News Reports

Bad news report is strongly affiliated with unpleasant, undesirable or harmful content (Haskins, 1981). The contents spur negative emotions and energy in audiences. This makes Harcup (2004) see bad news as stories with negative overtones. Bad news reports comprise war, famine, violence, corruption, recession, tragedy and scandal. McIntyre and Gyldensted (2017) claim that much of journalism has been dominated by a framework of conflict and negativity. In an earlier dissertation, McIntyre (2015) justified that news serves several traditional purposes in society, and this explains why news stories are often negative and conflict-based. These traditional purposes comprise journalists' duties to alert the public of threats, including exposure of government corruption (Entman, 2005; Eriksson & Ostman, 2013).

Bantz (1997) argues that news organisations see conflict as routine, expected, and perhaps essential. Also, conflict and negativity are identified as news values when training journalists on how to identify newsworthy information (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001; Shoemaker & Reese, 2013). Although reporters contribute to the negatively skewed news, journalists are not solely to blame. Trussler and Soroka (2014) found that politically interested news consumers chose to read negative stories rather than positive ones. This means that some media audiences are more interested in negative news reports than positive ones. These reports adversely affect them.

Davey (2012) carried out an experiment to examine the psychological effects of viewing negative content. In the study, three different 14-minute news bulletins were constructed: one was made of entirely negative news items, another was made up of entirely positive news items (e.g. people winning the lottery or recovering from illness), and the last one was made of emotionally neutral items. "As we predicted, those who watched the negative news bulletin all reported being significantly more anxious and sadder after watching this bulletin than those people who watched either the positive or neutral news bulletin" (Davey, 2012, p.2). Ngange, Mesumbe and Nnode (2024) equally disclose that bad news reports evoke anger, make the audience scared, affect the audience's mood, promote extremism and violence, reinforce distrust and hatred for public officials, increase the audience's blood pressure, and significantly reduce media exposure.

2.2 Voter Apathy

Electoral participation is one of the main guarantees of democracy. It permits citizens to choose their leaders and hold them accountable. Dalton (2008) explains that citizens' involvement in electoral processes is indispensable in strengthening democratic values and encouraging participatory development in a country. However, electoral turnout is

declining in most societies (Blais, 2000; Gray & Caul, 2000). This is known as voter apathy.

Agaigbe (2015) defines voters' apathy as the absence of interest in electoral processes by electorates. This occurs when individuals who are of voting age abstain from electoral activities (Blakeley & Cloud, 2023). Dolapo (2019) equally asserts that voter apathy is a condition in which people lack the motivation or inclination to carry out their civic responsibilities within society or participate in political activities. It is described as a lack of enthusiasm among some voter groups to participate in elections. Voter apathy is a major problem in mature and emerging democracies (Nigeria Independent National Electoral Commission & Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2011).

Voters' apathy results in low turnout during elections. Roberts (2009) defines voter turnout as the total number of electors who have participated in a political election. A decline in voter apathy increases turnout. An increase in voter turnout legitimises a political election, and it is a favourable indicator of participatory democracy (Chinsinga, 2003). Voter turnout is declining in most democracies (Blais, 2000). In South Africa, voter turnout is on a decline. It dropped from 89.24% in 1999 to 76.70% in April 2004, 73.48% in May 2014 (Oyedemi & Mahlatji, 2016) and 66.05% in May 2019. Alli (2023) described the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria as abysmal. This is because it witnessed the lowest turnout since the country's independence. Out of 93.4 million registered voters, 87.2 million collected their Permanent Voter's Card. However, just 24.9 million voted on Election Day. The United Kingdom, Switzerland and the Netherlands have experienced a decline in voter turnout (Franklin, 2004; Mair, 2007; Torcal & Montero, 2006).

Vergue (in Uchenna, Okeke, & Idike, 2013) discloses that low voters' turnout prevents an election from performing its three main functions: to discipline the elected officials by threat of not being reappointed (accountability effect), to select competent individuals for public office (legitimacy effect), and to reflect the preferences of a large spectrum of voters (representative effect). The accountability effect is straightforward. Studies show that voters' apathy mostly involved youths (Dalton, 2008; Martin, 2012; Henn, Weinstein & Forrest, 2005; Fieldhouse, Tranmer & Russell, 2007; Dermody, Hanmer-Llyod & Scullion, 2010). The willingness of youths to take part in elections is less than that of their parents or grandparents (Henn et al., 2005). Dalton (2008) affirms that youths are more interested in non-electoral activities such as volunteering, attending demonstrations, signing petitions, promoting a more direct approach to government affairs, and increasing interest in social justice. In the United States of America, the researcher states that young people are more willing to engage in non-electoral activities and less willing to participate in political activities like belonging to a political party and taking part in elections. In Australia, Martin (2012) realised that youths were more concerned with non-electoral forms of engagement than with engaging in electoral processes such as voting.

2.3 Causes of Voters' Apathy

Non-fulfilment of campaign promises: Politicians make several promises during periods of elections to persuade the electorate to vote. Unfortunately, some politicians fail to honour their promises when voted into office. Agaigbe (2015) enunciates that the non-respect of campaign promises to electorates contributes to voters' apathy. It discourages the electorate from participating in elections. The researcher further notes that the non-respect of campaign promises also results in political apathy. The electorates find it difficult to trust political actors or to believe in their promises. As a result, some have decided to deliberately abscond from electoral and political activities.

Absence of Political Interest: Voter turnout is strongly affiliated with voters' political interest. This means that the more voters are interested in political activities, the more likely they will show up during election periods (Goldberg & Sciarini, 2023; Blais, 2007). Contrary, the absence of political interest will restrain voters from taking part in electoral activities like elections. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) reveal that voters' context shapes their political interests, which in turn influences their decision to vote. They specify that parental influence and social media are shaping voters' interest in political activities. In the same vein, Hirzalla, Van Zoonen, and de Ridder (2011) assert that social media provides the quickest route to engage with young voters and persuade them to take part in political activities such as elections. It is also one of the platforms used to promote voter apathy initiatives.

Late deployment of officials and materials to polling units: Delays in the deployment of officials and materials to polling units contribute to voters' apathy. It makes eligible voters disappointed over the issue and return to their homes. Alli (2023) argues that the late deployment of officials and materials to polling units during the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria resulted in voters' apathy.

Economic downturn: Economic downturn refers to a decline in income, industrial production, wholesale, retail sales and employment in a country. An economic downturn is characterised by poverty, rising cost of living and unemployment. It is also known as a recession. The realities of poverty, unemployment and inequality demoralise and demotivate youths in political activities such as elections. It makes youths have a lacklustre attitude toward electoral participation. For instance, the high rate of poverty, inequality and unemployment in South Africa (Cassim & Oosthuizen, 2014) correlated with voters' apathy.

2.4 Operational Model

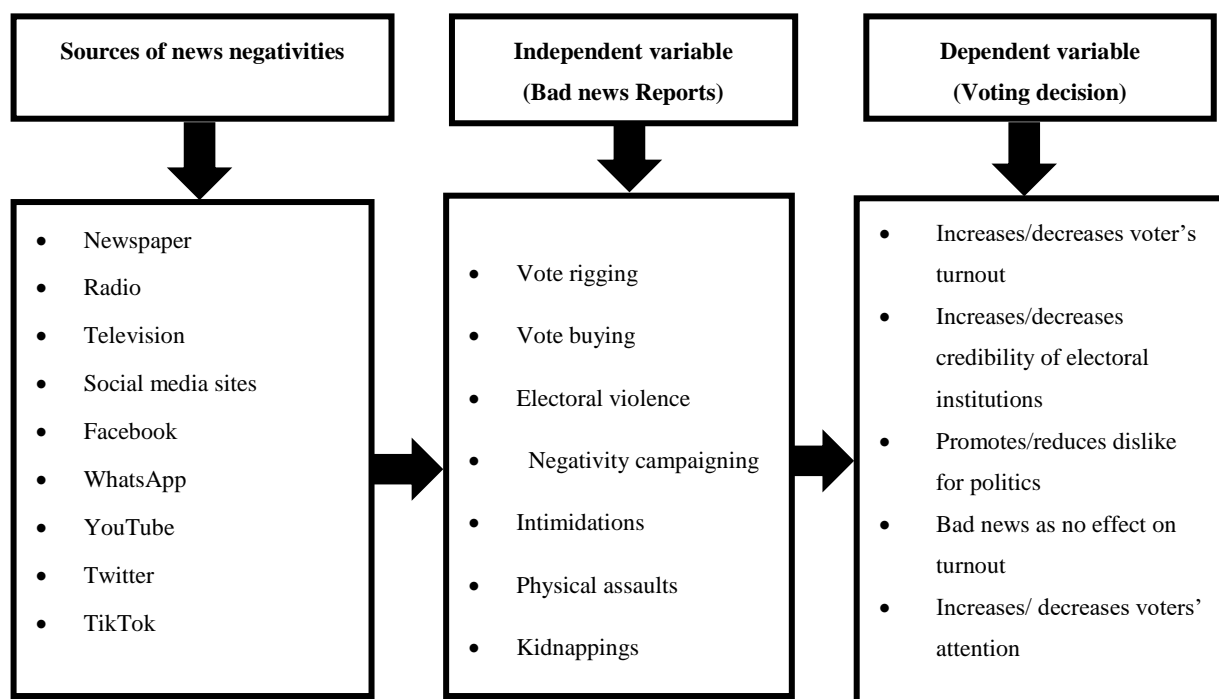


Figure 1. Effects of bad news on voters' apathy

Source: Researchers, 2025

The operational model describes the potential influence of bad news reports on voter apathy. The model assumes that bad news reports emanate from various media outlets. These outlets include conventional and digital media. The conventional media include newspapers, radio and television stations; meanwhile, the digital media include social media sites like Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Twitter and TikTok. Media practitioners utilise these outlets to communicate information to audiences. During electoral periods, the outlets are used to deliver news reports such as vote rigging, vote buying, negative campaigning, intimidation, physical assaults, and kidnappings. The reports can influence voting intention. The model considers bad news reports as the independent variable and voting decisions as the dependent variable. Audience exposure to bad news reports during electoral periods can increase or decrease voter turnout, dislike for politics, credibility of electoral institutions and attention to electoral events.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

Agenda Setting Theory: Max McCombs and Donald Shaw developed the Agenda Setting Theory in 1972 to demonstrate the power of the media in influencing the audience's attitude and behaviour. The idea of agenda setting emanates from Walter Lippmann's idea of "the world outside and the pictures in our heads" (Lippmann, 1922, p. 29). He raised concerns about the ability of the media to create certain mental images in the receiver. He notes that the news media are a primary source of those pictures in our heads about the larger world of public affairs, a world that for most citizens is "out of reach, out of sight, out of mind" (Lippmann, 1922, p.29). Lippmann believed that our understanding of this world is largely influenced by media messages. The messages determine how issues are perceived and prioritised in society.

Bernard Cohen contributed to the building of agenda setting. Cohen (1963, p.3) notes that the press "may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about. The world will look different to different people, depending on the map that is drawn for them by writers, editors, and publishers of the paper they read." This assertion points to the media's ability to influence public attention and priorities. McCombs and Shaw (1972) conducted the first empirical study on the agenda setting theory. The study was done during the 1968 presidential election in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Results of the study showed that salient issues prioritised by the news media correlated with voters' agenda. The findings supported Walter Lippmann and Bernard Cohen's claim that the media are instrumental in influencing the public's thoughts. This theory is instrumental to this research. Editors, newsroom staff and broadcasters shape political reality through constant selection and reporting on political issues. Their reports can promote political engagements or deter them. This research determines the extent to which the reports prioritised by media outlets (bad news reports) influence voting decisions in Cameroon.

Framing theory: Erving Goffman developed the framing theory in 1974. Entman (1993) defines framing as the process of selecting some aspects of reality and laying greater emphasis or relevance, such that a problem is defined, causes are established, moral judgements are recommended, and proper solutions and actions are proposed. Framing equally depicts the words, phrases, images and presentation styles used in relaying information about an issue or event to a media audience (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). Framing gives attention to some aspect of society (bad news reports) at the expense of others. The theory assumes that the manner in which media present content significantly affects people's (voters') understanding, perceptions, interpretations, opinions, attitudes and behaviours. Framing is considered the second level of agenda setting (McCombs, Llamas, López-Escobar & Rey, 1997). Its affiliation with agenda-setting theory has made some scholars advocate for it to be merged with the agenda-setting theory (Ardèvol-Abreu, 2015). Kim, Scheufele and Shanahan (2002) contend that merging the theories further complicates the distinction among them. Kim et al (2002) further differentiate that terminological and semantic differences build a frame, not the prominence of some or other attributes.

Media framing of societal issues is overwhelmingly negative. Issues, such as wars, terrorism, killings, famine, diseases, earthquakes, flooding, kidnappings, accidents, stealing, sexual abuse, are frequently reported in the news media compared to innovations, initiatives, peacebuilding, progress, achievements and solutions. During presidential elections, the news media prioritise negative campaigning, political scandals, political conflicts (within and without a party), vote rigging, vote buying, assaults and intimidation. The hypothesis here is that the more the media present information on the electoral process negatively (dominance of bad news), the more likely voters are to see engagements in any stage of voting (pre-during-after) as a waste of time, effort, and resources. Hence, the media have a strong role in shaping public understanding of the electoral process and the engagements that voters may develop from the information and news they consume.

3. Methodology

This research adopts the quantitative approach to tap into the experiences of many respondents on the issue under investigation. The approach is used to address the research problem. It enables the researchers to get a wider sample. This approach enables the researchers to measure the extent to which individuals in Buea, Bamenda, Bafoussam, Douala, Yaoundé and Maroua are interested in getting electoral information from the news media and the extent to which bad news reports affect their voting decision. Alternatively, this research could have used in-depth interviews (qualitative approach) by conducting interviews with individuals from these towns. However, the interviews could not have permitted the gathering of huge data suitable for generalisation, like the instance here.

Survey constituted the research method. This method is appropriate for measuring attitudes and behaviour of a wider population. Inhabitants from these towns, who are eligible to vote but have never done so in past presidential elections, measured the extent to which bad news reports affect their voting decision. The survey targeted only those who are eligible to vote (20 years and above) but have never voted in past presidential elections in Cameroon. The choice of qualified non-voters is strategic, given the overwhelming calls for the so-called "change" in Cameroon by a majority (sometimes on social media); yet, the action required for any "change" so demanded (voting) is neglected. Potential voters sometimes form opinions on social media about voting, but stay away from the process. This huge segment of the Cameroonian public could be an important core of democratic discussions in the country. Unfortunately, they have never participated in any elections. So, understanding their views in relation to their consumption of bad news and other potential factors is important. The essence is to understand whether bad news reports affect their voting intention. The sample of the study is 1,285. This sample size was divided among the six towns. Therefore, a total of 271 respondents were selected from the six regional towns using a simple random sampling technique.

A questionnaire was the research instrument. It consisted of three sections: bad news reports in the news media, the influence of bad news reports on voter apathy and demographic information. In the first section, the respondents were asked to indicate whether bad news reports: dominate the news media in Cameroon, accurately reflect the overall state of activities in Cameroon, and focus more on the negative aspects of issues. The section also measures whether the respondents are interested in getting information about electoral activities in Cameroon. The five-point scale measurement (agreement) was used in the first section of the questionnaire: Strongly Agree (100%), Agree (75%), Neutral (50%), Disagree (25%), and Strongly Disagree (0%). The second section measures the influence of bad news reports on voters' apathy. Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which specific types of bad news reports such as negative campaigning, scandals involving political aspirants, internal conflicts within political parties, corrupt activities of presidential aspirants, vote rigging, vote suppression, economic challenges, vote buying, political intimidations, electoral interferences, weak political manifestos and political instability could amplify and solidify their unwillingness to vote. The five point Likert scale measurement of extent: Maximum Extent (100%), Great Extent (75%), Neutral (50%), Low Extent (25%) and No Extent (0%), was used for the question. Other causes of voter apathy in Cameroon were also examined in the section using the five-point agreement scale.

Lastly, the section used the five-point extension scale: Maximum Extent (100%), Great Extent (75%), Neutral (50%), Low Extent (25%) and No Extent (0%), to measure respondents' opinion on whether an intensification of civic education, elaborate presentation on the policies of presidential aspirants, encouragement from friends and family, desire for societal change, campaigns free from threats and intimidations, political transparency, awareness campaigns on the importance of voting and positive campaigning will help to promote electoral participation in Cameroon. The third section focuses on the demographic information of the respondents: sex, age, educational level, occupation, political affiliation, religion and town of residence. To strengthen instrument reliability, a pre-test of 80 respondents was done.

Data collection lasted for 313 days (ten months and eight days). The researchers worked with trained research assistants in these towns. The data were coded, entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27, cleaned and analysed. Descriptive and inferential tests were conducted. Validity was ensured through face validity, content validity and construct validity. The Cronbach's alpha value for this study is 0.8. This signifies a high level of internal consistency. Ethical considerations like voluntary participation, confidentiality and informed consent were employed. Also, respondents were asked to be objective in their responses as findings would be used for academic and professional purposes to understand voting behaviour and democratic processes. They were also reminded that their responses will bring no harm to them (zero harm), since anonymity was ensured. This provided a conducive atmosphere for the collection of rich, objective, and accurate data.

4. Findings

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Out of 1,285 respondents, 609 (47.4%) are male and 629 (48.9%) are female. In terms of age, 660 (51.4%) are between 20 and 25 years, 384 (29.9%) are between 26 and 35 years, 131 (10.2%) are between 36 and 45 years, 34 (2.6%) fall within 46 and 55 years, 26 (2%) respondents are 56 years and older. Findings reveal that 77 (6%) of the respondents have First School Leaving Certificate, 246 (19.1%) have completed High School, 238 (18.5%) have the Higher National Diploma, 486 (37.8%) have Bachelor's degrees, 155 (12.1%) have Master's degrees, 38 (3%) have doctorate degrees. The results also disclose that 665 (51.8%) of the respondents are students, 276 (21.5%) are business operators, 85 (6.6%) are farmers, 59 (4.6%) are journalists, 26 (2%) are teachers, 15 (1.2%) are drivers, 13 (1%) are nurse, 13 (1%) are software engineers, 12 (0.9%) are medical scientists, 6 (0.5%) are lecturers, 5 (0.4%) are social workers, 5 (0.4%) are accountants, 5 (0.4%) are hair stylists, 5 (0.4%) are cooks, 4 (0.3%) are communication officers, 4 (0.4%) are housekeepers, 3 (0.2%) are tailors, 3 (0.2%) are lawyers, 3 (0.2%) are politicians, 2 (0.2%) are consultants, 2 (0.2%) are jurists, 2 (0.2%) are financial secretaries, 2 (0.2%) are police officers, 2 (0.2%) are petroleum engineers, 2 (0.2%) are managers, and 2 (0.2%) are electricians. Other professions, such as laboratory technician, human resource manager, Information Technology expert, carpentry, photography, digital marketing, network engineering, secretariat, paramedic, epidemiologist, janitor/cleaner, decoration, and car repairer, had 1 (0.1%) respondent each. 888 (69.1%) of the respondents do not support any political party in Cameroon, 175 (13.6%) support the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement, 108 (8.4%) support the Social Democratic Front, 52 (4%) support the Cameroon Renaissance Movement, 4 (0.3%) support the Cameroon Party for National Reconciliation, and 1 (0.1%) supports the Cameroon People's Party. The findings further disclose that 1091 (84.9%) respondents are Christians, 104 (8.1%) are Muslims, and 39 (3%) are African Traditionalists. Evidence also shows that 253 (19.7%) respondents live in Buea, 249 (19.4%) live in Bamenda, 238 (18.5%) live in Bafoussam, 232 (18.1%) live in Yaounde, 223 (17.4%) live in Douala and 90 (7%) live in Maroua, which is the least represented in this study. It was challenging and time-consuming to administer the questionnaires in the locality when compared to the other localities.

In terms of news consumption habits, majority of respondents mostly prefer WhatsApp (714, 55.6%), followed by television (699, 54.4%), Facebook (616, 47.9%), Websites (504, 39.2%), radio (464, 36.1%), YouTube (375, 29.3%), Newspapers (312, 24.3%), Instagram (312, 24.3%), and X (298, 23.2%). These sources give an idea of potential sources of good and bad news about voting.

4.2 Eligible Voters' Exposure to Negative News Reports

Table 1 reveals that bad news reports overwhelmingly dominate Cameroon's media landscape (767, 59.8%), predominantly focus on negative aspects of issues (722, 56.2%), and accurately reflect the overall state of Cameroon's activities (632, 48.5%).

Table 1. Negative News Reports in Cameroon News Media

Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD	Collapsed scale		
						Agree	Average	Disagree
Bad news reports overwhelmingly dominate the Cameroon media landscape	18.9% (242)	40.9% (525)	28.4% (365)	10.0% (129)	1.9% (24)	59.8% (767)	28.4% (365)	11.9% (153)
Bad news reports focus more on the negative aspects of issues	18.2% (234)	38.0% (488)	26.5% (341)	13.9% (178)	3.4% (44)	56.2% (722)	26.5% (341)	17.3% (222)
Bad news reports accurately reflect the overall state of Cameroon's activities	12.2% (157)	36.3% (466)	31.9% (410)	14.6% (188)	5.0% (64)	48.5% (623)	31.9% (410)	19.6% (252)

SA=Strongly agree, A=Agree, N=Neutral, D=Disagree, SD= Strongly disagree

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Table 2 reveals that most eligible voters in Cameroon are interested in getting electoral information on voters' registration, the publication of electoral lists, the verification of electoral list, the distribution of voters' card, political debates on electoral activities, campaign rallies, political meetings, about polling stations, electoral complaints, electoral protest, vote counting, stakeholders' reactions after the proclamation of electoral, and the mediation efforts of post-electoral problems.

Table 2. Eligible voters' interest in Electoral News

Electoral activities	SA	A	N	D	SD	Collapsed scale		
						Agree	Average	Disagree
Registration process for voters	28.0% (360)	29.7% (382)	29.8% (383)	8.2% (105)	4.3% (55)	57.7% (742)	29.8% (383)	12.7% (160)
Publication of the electoral list	23.0% (295)	29.1% (374)	33.9% (436)	9.9% (127)	4.1% (53)	52.1% (669)	33.9% (436)	14.0% (180)
Verification of the electoral list	24.9% (320)	24.7% (317)	33.4% (429)	10.6% (136)	6.5% (83)	49.6% (637)	33.4% (429)	17.1% (219)
Distribution of voters' cards	25.5% (328)	31.4% (404)	29.7% (382)	9.2% (118)	4.1% (53)	56.9% (732)	29.7% (382)	13.3% (71)
Political debates	19.7% (253)	32.5% (417)	33.2% (426)	10.3% (132)	4.4% (57)	52.2% (670)	33.2% (426)	14.7% (189)
Campaign rallies	17.2% (221)	29.3% (376)	36.5% (469)	12.3% (158)	4.7% (61)	46.5% (597)	36.5% (469)	17% (219)
Political meetings	17.6% (226)	25.9% (333)	37.5% (482)	13.9% (178)	5.1% (66)	43.5% (559)	37.5% (482)	19% (244)
Voting in polling stations	21.5% (276)	27.2% (350)	33.6% (432)	12.1% (155)	5.6% (72)	48.7% (626)	33.6% (432)	17.7% (227)
Complaints during elections	19.4% (249)	27.2% (350)	35.7% (459)	11.4% (146)	6.3% (81)	46.6% (599)	35.7% (459)	17.7% (227)
Protest during elections	19.3% (248)	24.6% (316)	35.7% (459)	13.0% (167)	7.4% (95)	43.9% (564)	35.7% (459)	20.4% (262)
Vote counting	26.9% (346)	25.9% (333)	31.1% (400)	10.8% (139)	5.2% (67)	52.8% (679)	31.1% (400)	16.0% (206)
Reaction from Election Stakeholders	19.2% (247)	25% (321)	38.6% (496)	10.9% (140)	6.3% (81)	44.2% (568)	38.6% (496)	17.2% (221)
Mediation efforts for election problems	18.9% (243)	25.0% (321)	37.6% (483)	12.8% (165)	5.7% (73)	43.9% (564)	37.6% (483)	18.5% (238)

SA=Strongly agree, A=Agree, N=Neutral, D=Disagree, SD= Strongly disagree

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

4.3 Hypothesis One: Eligible Voters Are Significantly Interested in Getting Electoral Information from the News Media

Table 3. Eligible voters are significantly interested in electoral information from the news media

One-Sample Statistics		One-Sample Test (CI: 95%)	
N	1285	Df	1284
Mean	45.3	T	47.3
Std. Deviation	9.7	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001

Test Value	32.5
Mean Difference	12.8

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Table 3 illustrates the result of a One-Sample T-test performed to determine whether or not eligible voters are significantly interested in getting electoral information from the news media. The result, $t(df = 1,284) = 47.3$, $p < 0.05$, reveals that eligible voters are significantly interested in getting electoral information from the news media. The result of the test was statistically significant at the 0.05 level with a 95% confidence interval. The mean of the sample (45.3) was significantly higher than the probable test mean of 32.5 (average agreement response).

4.4 Influence of Bad News Reports on Voter Apathy

Table 4 reveals that persistent negative news reports discourage citizens from voting during presidential elections. Specifically, 68.1% (30.8% strongly agree and 37.3% agree) of eligible voters admitted that persistent negative news reports can create an environment that discourages citizens from voting during presidential elections in Cameroon. In contrast, 7.8% (5.2% disagree and 2.6% strongly disagree) of the eligible voters disagreed with the statement, while 24% were neutral. These findings show that continuous negative news reports contribute to voter apathy in Cameroon.

Table 4. Persistent Negative News Reports Promote Voter Apathy

Variables	Gender			Total
	Male	Female	No response	
Strongly agree (100%)	15.6%(201)	14.5%(186)	0.7%(09)	30.8%(396)
Agree (75%)	17.4%(224)	19.1%(246)	0.7%(09)	37.3%(479)
Neutral (50%)	10.3%(132)	11.8%(151)	2.0%(26)	24.0%(309)
Disagree (25%)	2.6% (33)	2.5% (32)	0.2% (02)	5.2% (67)
Strongly disagree (25%)	1.5% (19)	1.1% (14)	0.1% (01)	2.6% (34)
Total	47.4%(609)	48.9% (629)	3.7% (47)	100%(1285)

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Table 5 identifies respondents' justifications as to why bad news reports discourage or promote voting. The responses, derived from an open-ended question, add qualitative insights into this work, and could form the basis for further research. Those who reveal that bad news reports promote voter apathy explained that: it makes them feel that presidential elections in Cameroon lack transparency; their votes will not count or make a difference; it causes fear and this makes them shy away from voting during presidential elections; it makes them believe that future elections will be rigged; it makes them believe that there is no good presidential aspirant; it creates a negative impression about electoral events; it smears the image of presidential aspirants and it makes them feel that presidential aspirants are incapable of addressing pressing societal issues. On the contrary, some respondents reveal that bad news reports cannot discourage voting because the desire to orchestrate reforms enhances voting; it is a constitutional right for every citizen to vote regardless of negative news information about electoral activities; negative news cannot influence their voting decision, and bad news reports cannot stop people from voting.

Table 5. Justification for the Effect of Negative News Reports on Voting Participation

Justifications	Total	Percentage
Negative news reports discourage voting because		
It makes me feel that presidential elections lack transparency	194	15.1
It makes citizens believe that their votes will not count and will make no change	71	5.5
It causes fear, and this makes citizens shy away from voting during presidential elections	67	5.2
Reports of political instability will make voters stay at home during voting days due to the fight	58	4.5
Reports on vote rigging discourage citizens since they believe that future elections will also be rigged	56	4.4
It makes me think that there is no good presidential candidate	55	4.3
It creates negative impressions of electoral events	39	3.0
People easily believe negative news reports	31	2.4
Reports on clashes between political parties discourage participation in the election	24	1.9
Negative news reports make most people believe that the economy is too bad, and they become less concerned about activities like elections	13	1.0
It smears the image of presidential candidates. This discourages voting	13	1.0
Negative news reports easily change the mindset of people	12	0.9
Bad news reports about unfulfilled promises from politicians discourage voting.	7	0.6
Negative news reports demonstrate the inability of presidential candidates to address pressing societal issues	3	0.2
Total	643	50
The effect is neutral because		
Neutral because negative news reports only discourage some people	163	12.7
Negative news reports do not discourage voting because		
The desire to orchestrate reforms enhances voting	43	3.4
It is the constitutional right of every citizen to vote, regardless of negative news information about election	15	1.2

activities		
Negative news reports cannot influence my voting decision	15	1.2
Bad news reports may or may not be true, and they do not stop people from voting	9	0.7
Total	82	6.5
I do not know	7	0.5
No response	390	30.3
Grand Total	1285	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

4.5 Hypothesis Two: There is a Positive Correlation Between Exposure to Negative News Reports and Voter Apathy in Cameroon

Table 6. Correlation between negative news reports and voter apathy

	Negative news reports	Voter Apathy
Negative news reports	Pearson correlation 1	0.2**
	Significance (p-value) .001	
	N 1285	1285
Voter Apathy	Pearson correlation 0.2**	1
	Significance (p-value) .001	
	N 1285	1285

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

The Pearson Correlation Coefficient was used to determine the correlation between exposure to negative news and voter apathy in Cameroon. Findings reveal a positive correlation ($r=0.2$) between exposure to negative news and voter apathy in Cameroon. This positive correlation shows that when negative news reports increase, voter apathy tends to increase. The strength of this relationship is not strong. This shows that negative news reports are not the only factor contributing to voter apathy in Cameroon. Table 7 reveals other factors such as broken or unfulfilled promises from politicians (78%), lack of trust in electoral institutions (70.6%), vote rigging (67.2%), the feeling of detachment from Cameroon's political systems (60.1%), limited political information or education (56.7%), complex voting procedure (53.3%), and the absence of strong opposition parties in the nation. These factors, alongside negative news reports, contribute to the prevalence of voter apathy in the nation.

Table 7. Other Causes of Voter Apathy in Cameroon

Causes of voter apathy	SA	A	N	D	SD	Total	Collapsed scale		
	(100%)	(75%)	(50%)	(25%)	(0%)		Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Broken or unfulfilled promises from politicians	45.4% (584)	34.2% (440)	15.9% (204)	2.9% (37)	1.6% (20)	100% (1285)	79.6% (1024)	15.9% (204)	4.5% (57)
Lack of trust in electoral institutions	37.6% (483)	33.0% (424)	23.0% (296)	4.6% (59)	1.8% (23)	100% (1285)	70.6% (907)	23.0% (296)	6.4% (82)
The feeling that my vote will not make a difference	36.3% (466)	30.9% (397)	24.3% (312)	6.5% (83)	2.1% (27)	100% (1285)	67.2% (863)	24.3% (312)	8.6% (110)
The feeling of detachment from political systems	23.1% (297)	37% (476)	33.2% (427)	5.4% (70)	1.2% (15)	100% (1285)	60.1% (773)	33.2% (427)	6.6% (85)
Limited information or political education	23.3% (299)	33.4% (429)	32.6% (419)	8.2% (106)	2.5% (32)	100% (1285)	56.7% (728)	32.6% (419)	10.7% (138)
Complexity of voting procedures	20.6% (265)	32.7% (420)	35.3% (453)	8.7% (112)	2.7% (35)	100% (1285)	53.3% (685)	35.3% (453)	11.4% (147)
The absence of strong opposition parties makes me not vote.	22.5% (289)	27.1% (348)	30.6% (393)	14.6% (187)	5.3% (68)	100% (1285)	49.6% (637)	30.6% (393)	19.9% (255)
Political candidates do not always represent my interests.	19.9% (256)	28.0% (360)	34.7% (446)	12.1% (156)	5.2% (67)	100% (1285)	47.9% (616)	34.7% (446)	17.3% (223)
I receive threatening messages indicating that I should not vote.	17.7% (227)	15.6% (201)	28.7% (369)	15.9% (204)	22.1% (284)	100% (1285)	33.3% (428)	28.7% (369)	28.0% (488)
I am always too busy during voting periods.	13.6% (175)	17.9% (230)	31.1% (399)	23.0% (295)	14.5% (186)	100% (1285)	31.5% (405)	31.1% (399)	37.5% (481)

N= 1,285, Mean= 35.9; Standard deviation= 6.3; Hypothesised mean = 25; p-value = 0.001

SA=Strongly agree, A=Agree, N=Neutral, D=Disagree, SD= Strongly disagree

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Table 8 reveals that a decline in negative news reports during electoral periods will contribute to enhancing voters' turnout. Specifically, 62.6% (18.4% strongly agree and 44.2% agree) of eligible voters affirmed that a decline in the prevalence of negative news reports during electoral periods will contribute to the promotion of voters' turnout as opposed to 7.6% (6.5% disagree and 1.1% strongly disagree) who disagreed with the statement while 29.7% were neutral.

Table 8. Decline in Negative News Reports Enhances Voters' Turnout

Variables	Gender			Total
	Male	Female	No response	
Strongly agree (100%)	10%(129)	8.2%(105)	0.2%(03)	18.4%(237)
Agree (75%)	20.8%(267)	22.6%(291)	0.8%(10)	44.2%(568)
Neutral (50%)	13.2%(169)	14%(180)	2.6%(33)	29.7%(382)
Disagree (25%)	3.2% (41)	3.3% (43)	0.0% (00)	6.5% (84)
Strongly disagree (25%)	0.2% (03)	0.8% (10)	0.1% (01)	1.1% (14)
Total	47.4%(609)	48.9% (629)	3.7% (47)	100%(1285)

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Table 9 also reveals that the intensification of civic education, fervent desire for societal change, positive campaigning, political transparency like asset declaration, sensitisation campaigns on electoral processes, elaborate information on the manifestos of presidential aspirants, peaceful political atmosphere and peer support can contribute to voter turnout in Cameroon.

Table 9. Other Ways to Enhance Voter Turnout

Ways to enhance voter turnout	M.E	G.E	N	L.E	N.E	Collapsed scale		
	(100%)	(75%)	(50%)	(25%)	(0%)	High	Neutral	Low
Intensification of civic education	33.1% (425)	40.4% (519)	22.3% (286)	3.0% (39)	1.2% (16)	73.5% (944)	22.3% (286)	4.2% (55)
A fervent desire for societal change	29.6% (380)	36.3% (466)	26.5% (340)	5.8% (74)	1.9% (25)	65.9% (846)	26.5% (340)	7.7% (99)
Presidential aspirants should focus on their potential rather than insulting rivals.	30.3% (389)	33.7% (433)	25.9% (333)	6.8% (88)	3.3% (42)	64% (822)	25.9% (333)	10.1% (130)
Political transparency, like the declaration of assets	31.6% (406)	32.4% (416)	28.5% (366)	5.9% (76)	1.6% (21)	64.0% (822)	28.5% (366)	7.5% (97)
Awareness campaigns on the importance of voting	30.5% (392)	33.2% (427)	28.1% (361)	6.5% (84)	1.6% (21)	63.7% (819)	28.1% (361)	8.1% (105)
Elaborate information on the policies of presidential aspirants	21.2% (272)	42.4% (545)	29.5% (379)	5.7% (73)	1.2% (16)	63.6% (817)	29.5% (379)	6.9% (89)
Campaigns free from threats and intimidations	28.7% (369)	34.1% (438)	27.1% (348)	7.5% (96)	2.6% (34)	62.8% (807)	27.1% (348)	10.1% (130)
Encouragement from friends and family	20.0% (257)	31.3% (402)	33.7% (433)	12.7% (163)	2.3% (30)	51.3% (659)	33.7% (433)	15% (193)

M.E= Maximum Extent, G.E= Great Extent, N= Neutral, L.E= Low Extent & N.E= No Extent

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

5. Discussion

5.1 Bad news reports in the Cameroonian Media

The findings reveal that bad news reports have overwhelmingly dominated the Cameroonian media landscape. It suggests that most of what passes in the news media in Cameroon are characterised by negative content such as conflict, disagreements, violence, terrorism, fear, wars/conflicts, illegal/nefarious activity, cybercrime, sexual abuse, famines, disease, the harmful portrayal of groups, shootings, unexpected/unfortunate deaths, and natural disasters (Proctor, 2021). Studies conducted in different parts of the globe affirm the prevalence of negative news reports in the media (Arango-Kure, Garz & Rott, 2014; Edwards, 2017; Zillmann, Chen, Knobloch, & Callison, 2004). The situation is so prominent that it has triggered the adage that when it bleeds, then it leads (Edwards, 2017; Haagerup, 2015) and bad news sells (Arango-Kure, Garz & Rott, 2014). Negative reporting pushes media audiences to see the world as mean (mean world syndrome proposed by Canadian scholar Marshall McLuhan). So, through bad news, could potential voters be seeing 'the world of voting' as potentially dangerous, frightening, and not worthwhile?

Results of this study also reveal that most eligible voters are interested in receiving news updates on electoral activities (before, during, and after presidential elections) from various sources such as WhatsApp, television, Facebook, websites, radio, YouTube, newspapers, Instagram, and X. Ngange, Mesumbe, and Nnode (2024) found that in a sample of 376 respondents, 42.8% believed that social media are fervent in disseminating bad news, while 46% attested that conventional media are prominent in bad news dissemination. Specifically, respondents are interested in getting information about the registration process for voters, publication of the electoral list, verification of the electoral list, distribution of voters' cards, political debates, campaign rallies, political meetings, voting in polling stations, complaints during elections, protest during elections, vote counting, reaction from election stakeholders, and mediation efforts for election problems. In line with this, Piolatto and Schuett (2015, p.1) assert that "there is some evidence that many people consume political news because they consider it their civic duty to stay informed about politics or because they strive to

make good decisions at the ballot box.” Quintas-Froufe, González-Neira and Conde-Vázquez (2020) also realised that television is the preferred medium for information about electoral processes.

The findings also support research by the Sociological Research Center (2019), which reveals that 84.1% of Spanish people rely on television, 39.5% on social networks and others on radio, and newspapers to find information about political matters and the electoral campaign. This shows that the news media keep audiences informed of electoral processes. When the news media provide citizens with politically relevant information, they are more likely to participate politically and vote in elections (Kübler & Goodman, 2019). This increases voter turnout.

5.2 Negative News Reports and Voter Apathy

The findings reveal a positive relationship between negative news reports and voter apathy. The relationship suggests that when individuals are exposed to more negative news content such as reports of corruption, electoral violence, vote rigging, scandalous reports involving presidential aspirants, government inefficiency, internal conflicts within political parties, vote suppression, vote buying, intimidations of presidential aspirants, verbal assaults, and political instability, their level of apathy toward voting increases. Similarly, Adeyemi and Salawudeen (2020) found that unfulfilled political promises, political intimidation, bad governance, illiteracy and ignorance, rigging, unfair governmental policies, marginalisation, victimisation of political opponents, unfair distribution of resources, lack of accountability, delay and denial of justice, poverty, corruption, religious constraints and insincerity of the electoral commission trigger voter apathy.

The strength of the relationship between bad news reports and voter apathy is weak ($r=0.2$). The statistical test used to establish this relation is correlation, considering its ability in measuring the relationship and direction between and amongst variables. Descriptive findings point to the existence of other factors contributing to the prevalence of voter apathy in Cameroon. They include broken or unfulfilled promises from politicians (78%), lack of trust in electoral institutions (70.6%), vote rigging (67.2%), the feeling of detachment from Cameroon's political systems (60.1%), limited political information or education (56.7%), complex voting procedure (53.3%), and the absence of strong opposition parties in the nation. In conformity, Fame (2020) asserts that controversial political processes and growing distrust among Cameroonians contribute to electoral apathy in the nation. He enunciates that opposition parties and several national and international observers have always complained that electoral processes in Cameroon since the return of multiparty politics are characterised by malpractices such as fraud, multiple voting, theft of important documents during elections, undue intervention of government officials in the process and political corruption.

The findings also suggest that security concerns contribute to promoting voter apathy in Cameroon. Some respondents (33.3%) attested to receiving threatening messages from unknown individuals against voting. This phenomenon is common in the restive regions of Cameroon, especially in the North West and South West regions. During the 2018 presidential elections, separatists instituted ghost towns and lockdowns throughout the electoral period. They also sent out messages using different formats – audio, text, videos, and flyers through social media platforms and their partisan television channels to enforce threats against voting. The findings also support the articulation of the International Crisis Group in 2018. The International Crisis Group (2018) disclosed that the Boko Haram insurgency in the Far North of Cameroon severely affected the 2018 electoral processes. The activities of the insurgent group frustrated the movement of electoral materials and people to polling stations.

Results equally reveal that intensification of civic education, fervent desire for societal change, positive campaigning, political transparency like asset declaration, sensitisation campaigns on electoral processes, elaborate information on the manifesto of presidential aspirants, peaceful political atmosphere and peer support can contribute to voter turnout in Cameroon. These empirical findings are backed by Astbury (2024), who asserted that voter education and outreach, ease of voter registration, enhanced civic engagement efforts, and addressing structural barriers and inequities can contribute to enhancing voter apathy. Astbury (2024) enunciates that voters should be educated on electoral processes. He believes that this education can occur through news reports, direct mailers, fliers, email campaigns, and direct conversations. The author also explained that the simplification of the voter registration process would enhance voter registration and, consequently, enhance turnout. Adeyemi and Salawudeen (2020) also proposed that sensitisation campaigns, regular mass mobilisation, good governance, free and fair elections, representation of diverse opinions, interests, tribes and groups, an independent and objective judiciary system, a peaceful and serene environment, and adequate security protection can promote voter turnout in presidential elections. The findings support the agenda setting and framing theories.

5.3 Reflections on the Cameroon Media Ecosystem

On reflections about the media environment of Cameroon, it is worth emphasizing that the media landscape of the country is rich and diversified. Pre-colonial press was dominated by newspapers, then came radio, television, and today, the internet with huge audience access to social media and varied online contents. Law No. 90/052 of 19 December 1990 permitted freedom of mass communications in the country, while Prime Ministerial Text No. 2000/158 of April 3, 2000 liberalized the private audio-visual sector.

The National Communication Council (NCC) of Cameroon (November 30, 2024) estimates that Cameroon has over 760 legally approved newspapers, including 232 print media organs published on a regular basis. The report also states that there are 93 television channels, 129 commercial radio stations, 169 community radio stations, 72 online media outlets, and 65 cable distribution companies.

In the affirmative, therefore, the Cameroon media landscape is diverse; though critics question the degree of freedom of these media institutions and journalists, with emphasis that the state media (Cameroon Radio Television, Cameroon Tribune newspaper and associates, and L'Action newspaper owned by the ruling Cameroon People's Democratic Movement) enjoy more freedom and tolerance when compared to private press which are subjected to rigorous regulations.

Apart from the traditional private versus public media ownership trends which dominated discussions over decades, Forcha and Ngange (2022) uncovered new patterns of media ownership in the country such as horizontal ownership, conglomerates, cross-ownership, sole proprietorship, vertical, religious, community, regional line, political line ownership, and co-ownership. These varied patterns affect content production and consumption in varied ways, and give voters the means to choose information and education channels, and how they use the messages to influence their voting behaviour.

6. Conclusion

The conclusion of this study is based on the specific objectives: to measure eligible voters' interest in electoral information and to determine the influence of negative news reports on voter apathy in Cameroon. The results reveal that most eligible voters in Cameroon are interested in getting electoral information on voters' registration, the publication of electoral lists, the verification of electoral list, the distribution of voters' card, political debates on electoral activities, campaign rallies, political meetings, polling stations, electoral complaints, electoral protest, vote counting, stakeholders' reactions after the proclamation of electoral, and the mediation efforts of post-electoral problems. It also showed that bad news reports overwhelmingly dominate Cameroon's media landscape, principally focus on negative aspects of issues, and reflect the overall state of Cameroon's activities. This sort of framing sets the agenda for voters' voting behaviour.

The investigation also unveils a positive correlation between exposure to negative news and voter apathy in Cameroon. Other causes of voter apathy in the nation include broken or unfulfilled promises from politicians, lack of trust in electoral institutions, vote rigging, the feeling of detachment from Cameroon's political systems, limited political information or education, complex voting procedure, and the absence of strong opposition parties.

7. Recommendations

Political actors should always engage in issue-based debates during electoral campaigns rather than focusing on controversies and conflicts that discourage voter participation. Issue-based debates enable political actors to showcase and explain their plans for Cameroonians. Since Cameroonians are interested in electoral information, the actors should maximise this interest to present and defend their manifestos rather than criticising and attacking political opponents.

Election stakeholders in Cameroon should intensify efforts to create awareness on the importance of voting. They should maximise various media outlets to explain the importance of political participation to a nation like Cameroon. The officials should also ensure that electoral activities are free from manipulation or vote rigging.

Furthermore, individuals should always endeavour to participate in various political processes in Cameroon. Participation is essential in addressing societal problems and selecting the right leaders for the country. Absconding from political processes does not solve societal problems. Instead, it gives room for illegality to flourish. Therefore, individuals of voting age should register and participate in voting.

Finally, the National Communication Council and the Ministry of Communication should organise capacity-building sessions on electoral reporting. These sessions will help journalists know how to report electoral events. It will also help journalists to be independent and desist from using their media establishments as battlegrounds for bad news.

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Authors' contributions

Neville N. Mesumbe, Dr. Stephen N. Nnode, and Professor Kingsley L. Ngange were all responsible for conceptualization, definition of objectives of the study, research questions, study design, and revising. All authors read and approved the final manuscript. Neville N. Mesumbe and Dr. Stephen N. Nnode ensured data collection and analysis (with the aid of research assistants), while Professor Kingsley L. Ngange provided expert advice and directions for these

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