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## INSINCERE AND DECEPTIVE PROMISES BY POLITICIANS: CITIZENS' PERCEPTION OF ITS EFFECTS ON VOTING DECISION

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### ABSTRACT

This paper has investigated the effects of insincere and deceptive promises by politicians on citizens' voting decision. It starts with a discourse on the promises usually made by politicians during electioneering campaign, the objective of such promises and the deceptiveness inherent in the promises. An empirical study was carried out whose main objectives are: to determine the purpose of making election promises; whether politicians make insincere and deceptive promises or not; if politicians and their parties keep their campaign promises once elected; and the impact that deceptive political promises have on the electorate. Field survey was conducted within four Nigerian cities, Abeokuta, Ago-Iwoye, Ibadan, and Ikeja. Cluster sampling technique was adopted in selecting distinct clusters- campuses, offices, households, and markets, from the population. In all, 300 people were selected for the research while a structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The empirical study confirms the assertion that some promises made by politicians are bogus and/or mostly exaggerated, and insincerely made, with the main purpose of deceiving the electorate to vote for them. The study also shows that women are more influenced by insincere and deceptive political promises than men in their voting decisions. Also, less educated people are more influenced by deceptive political promises than the more educated people. The paper therefore recommends among others that: the public should hold politicians accountable for their promises and appropriate Federal and State laws should be promulgated to make this recommendation effective; politicians should make sincere, realistic, and feasible promises in their election campaign. The paper also recommends that we should make fulfilment of freely-made election promises legally binding on our politicians.

**Keywords:** Deception, insincerity, politician, promise, voting decision.

## INTRODUCTION

Political campaign promises can be defined as specific actions, activities or statements made by politicians and/or their political parties telling the electorate and the people at large what they will definitely do (or refrain from doing) if elected. It is a form of contractual agreement between politicians and their parties on one hand and the electorate on the other hand; a candidate promising to do A, B, C, . . . , X, Y, Z for the electorate if elected, and based on those promises the electorate deciding to vote for the candidate. The dictionary meaning of the words “I promise to...” is that the speaker, by uttering them, puts himself under a certain obligation- an obligation to fulfil the act promised (Ayres and Klass, 2005).

A 2017 study in the *American Journal of Political Science* found that for 12 European and North American countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Canada, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom, and United States), political parties (and their candidates) fulfil their promises to voters to a considerable extent (Thomas *et al.*, 2017). Candidates that hold executive office after elections generally fulfil substantial percentages, sometimes very high percentages, of their campaign promises; but then, some of those unfulfilled promises may be fundamental to the electorate. The story is, however, different in many African and Asian countries where politicians abandon campaign promises with impunity.

Promises made during political campaigns covers all methods or approaches used in influencing a target audience to believing, supporting and/or promoting one's political ideas. The basic methods/mediums used include the following:

- Traditional open-air/field campaigns (political rallies);
- Traditional broadcast media (radio and television);
- Print media (newspapers, magazines, periodicals, etc.);
- Outdoor advertising (billboards, posters, mobile campaign vehicles, fliers/handbills, banners, etc.);
- Internet technologies and Social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, text messages, Instagram, WhatsApp, Telegram, bloggers, etc.).

The main objectives of political campaign/election promises are twofold- (i) to create awareness about a party (or its candidates') intended programs, projects, and key activities if elected, and (ii) to seek electoral support of the people. It is based on these promises that most electorates decide on the individuals or party to vote for. A reason why politicians get away with unfulfilled promises is that there are no checks and balances made before or during their tenure in office.

The main focus of this paper is to assess the citizens' perception of the effect of insincere and deceptive promises by politicians on voting decisions.

### **Politicians and their Insincere and Deceptive Promises**

Politicians are groups of people who have put themselves out (mostly under a political party) to administer the affairs of a country (or part of) so as to ensure the realization of policy objectives of that country (or part of, as the case may be). In Nigeria (and world over), politicians make promises to the voting populace to swing their support. The most common promises made at every election by Nigerian politicians include:

- Provision of employment opportunities to the youths;

- Provision of adequate water and electricity;
- Security of lives and property;
- Fighting corruption and stabilizing the economy;
- Overhaul of educational and health infrastructures;
- Urban and rural road expansion/construction/rehabilitation;
- Food security and provision of subsidy to farmers on agricultural produce.

### **How can a Promise be Insincere or Deceptive?**

A promise can be considered as insincere or deceptive when the promisor never intended to fulfil the promise or simply when a promisor fails to keep a promise when there are no 'genuine' situations which may warrant breaking of such promise; it is a case of promissory fraud.

In the buildup to elections and in their campaigns, some candidates and/or their political parties make promises that are deceptive in nature. Such deceptive promises often mislead voters into voting for candidates/parties which ordinarily they might not be interested in electing. Some examples of deceptive political promises are:

- (i) In the buildup to the United States 1988 presidential election, the candidate of the Republican Party, George H.W. Bush, promised Americans no new taxes if elected. He declared: "Read my lips; no new taxes". This singular promise galvanized huge support for him; it helped him win the election. However, few years into his tenure, Bush introduced new taxes paid by Americans. This reversal of promise hurt him in 1992 when Americans refused to reelect him (Wikipedia, 2021).

- (ii) In 1994, upon entering Italian politics, media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi promised that he would sell his assets in Fininvest (later Mediaset), because of the conflict of interest that it would have generated. Berlusconi repeated this promise a number of times in later years, but after 12 years and having served three terms as prime minister, he still retains ownership of his company that controls virtually all the Italian private TV stations and a large number of magazines and publishing houses, which have extensively been used in favour of his political party. He never fulfilled this promise, which sparked controversy throughout his terms in office (Schneider, 2014).
  
- (iii) When President Muhammadu Buhari was campaigning for the 2015 general elections, he and his party, the All Progressives Congress (APC) made several promises to the electorate. One of such promises was: to defeat Boko-Haram within a year of his assuming power. This was one singular promise that galvanized massive votes for the then candidate Buhari. Many Nigerians were tired of the incessant bombings and criminal atrocities of the Boko Haram sect under Buhari's predecessor, President Goodluck Jonathan. This promise was not fulfilled within the timeframe promised by Mr. Buhari nor has it been fulfilled now, six years in office by Mr. Buhari. Boko Haram is still unleashing terror on many parts of the Northeast. Under President Buhari's watch, many Nigerian soldiers and military personnel have been killed while morale has gotten to its lowest ebb among troops resulting in protests and mutiny (The Cable, 2021).

**Is Breaking of One's Promise same as Telling a lie?**

It is wrong to conflate promise breaking and lying. Many parents have heard their children tell them, with no small degree of indignation, that: “Mum, you lied to me; you said you would (buy me ice cream, take me to the Park, ...)”. Accusations of this nature can be evidence of conceptual confusion. You might be a scoundrel for breaking your promise, but you are not thereby a liar. A liar is someone who knowingly misrepresents an existing fact. The act of promising to do (or to refrain from doing) something in the future does not, by itself, give the promisor even the opportunity to lie. But if a promise not only puts the promisor under an obligation, but also says that such-and-such is the case, then it too can be a lie (Ayres and Klass, 2005). For example, if a father tells his undergraduate son “If you graduate with a First Class, I will buy you a car”. Barring any colossal misfortune (e.g., job loss or protracted illness), the father is under obligation to gift his son a car should the son graduates with a First Class; otherwise, the father had lied. It is a clear insincere promise.

### **Empirical Study**

The main objectives of the empirical study are:

- (i) To determine the purpose of making election promises;
- (ii) To determine whether politicians make insincere and deceptive promises or not;
- (iii) To determine if politicians and their parties keep their campaign promises once elected, and;
- (iv) To determine the impact that deceptive political promises have on the electorate when deciding which candidate or party to vote for.

### **Research Methodology**

The field survey was conducted within four Nigerian cities- Abeokuta and Ago-Iwoye in Ogun State, Ibadan in Oyo State, and Ikeja in Lagos State. In order to make the sample to be representative of the population of interest (voting population, viz. Nigerians 18 years and above), a random sampling technique, Cluster sampling, was used in selecting the following distinct clusters from the population- campuses, offices, households, and markets. The same Cluster sampling technique was used in selecting secondary units within the earlier selected primary clusters.

Cluster sampling technique is used mainly in geographically distributed population (Afonja *et al.*, 2014) or in a situation in which there is geographical dispersion of members of the population and where a sampling frame is not available or it is incomplete (Gupta, 2012). In all, 300 people were selected for the research, 50 in each of Abeokuta and Ago-Iwoye, and 100 in each of Ibadan and Ikeja. A structured questionnaire was used as a research instrument for data collection. A total of 276 questionnaire forms were received back, giving a response rate of  $\left(\frac{276}{300} \times 100\right) = 92$  per cent. Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents among the sampling units.

**Table 1. Distribution of Respondents Among Sampling Units**

<b>Sampling Units</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Total Respondents</b>
Undergraduate Students	58	21.0%
Civil/Public Servants	37	13.4%
Company Workers	36	13.0%
Housewives	57	20.7%
Traders	88	31.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Source:** Computed from Field Survey

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The basic research questions centred on finding about the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, the objective of election promises by politicians, and the notion of insincere and deceptive promises as well as the effects of deceptive promises on the electorate's voting decisions. The research findings are discussed under the following sub-headings:

### **Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents**

Required data on the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents were extracted from the 276 questionnaire forms received out of 300 administered. The three characteristics of interest used in this study are: sex, age, and educational background.

- (i) **Sex of Respondents:** 134 of the respondents are male, while the remaining 142 are female. Thus, male respondents represent 49% of total respondents, while female represents 51%.



- (ii) **Age Distribution:** Table 2 below shows the age distribution of respondents:

**Table 2. Age Distribution of Respondents**

Age (in years)	Number of Respondents	% of Total Respondents
Below 25	44	15.9%
25 – 34	70	25.4%
35 – 44	91	33.0%
45 – 54	56	20.3%
55 and above	15	5.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Source:** Computed from Field Survey

Table 2 shows that majority of the respondents (i.e.,  $276 - 44 = 232 = 84.1\%$ ) are at least 25 years old and would have witnessed at least two political campaign seasons in the country and, probably, exercised their voting franchise at the elections. Only 44 of the respondents (i.e., 15.9%) are below 25 years of age.

- (iii) **Educational Background of Respondents:** Table 3 below shows the educational attainment of the 276 respondents:

**Table 3: Educational Background of Respondents**

<b>Educational Level</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>% of Total Respondents</b>
Below Secondary School	20	7.2%
Secondary School	87	31.5%
Undergraduate/First Degree	139	50.4%
Postgraduate	30	10.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Source:** Computed from Field Survey

Table 3 shows that 20, representing 7.2% of the respondents had below secondary school education; 139, representing 50.4% had first degree or were undergraduate; while 30, representing 10.9% of the respondents had postgraduate (M.Sc., Ph.D., etc.) qualification.

**Purpose of Making Election Promises/Notion of Insincere and Deceptive Promises**

- (i) The respondents were asked to express their opinion on what they believe is the main purpose of election promises made by politicians and their parties. They were to choose only one of three statements, the one which best suit their opinion. Table 4 below shows the three statements and the opinion of the respondents.

**Table 4: Purpose of Making Election Promises**

Statement of Opinion	Number of Respondents	% of Total Respondents
To create awareness about their candidates and party	59	21.4%
To tell the people what they will surely do if elected	90	32.6%
To deceive the people with bogus promises	127	46.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Source:** Computed from Field Survey

From Table 4, it can be seen that the greater proportion of the respondents (i.e., 46%) opined that the purpose of making election promises (by Nigerian politicians) is essentially “to deceive the people with bogus promises”. This tends to show that the electorate do not believe that the politicians make their promises, *ab initio*, sincerely. Only 32.6% of the respondents opined what is basically the purpose of election promises, viz. “to tell the people what they (the candidates and their parties) will surely do if elected”.

- (ii) The respondents were asked whether making of bogus and deceptive promises do enhance the chances of candidates in an election. This was a YES/NO question.

One hundred and eighty (180), representing 65.2% of the total 276 respondents said “YES” to this statement, while 96, representing 34.8%, said “NO”. Thus, it is of general believe by Nigerian electorate that

politicians make deceptive campaign promises in order to enhance their electoral fortunes.

(iii) The respondents were asked whether, personally, they are influenced by election promises made by politicians when deciding whom to cast their votes for. Table 5 below shows the distribution of the opinion of the respondents.

**Table 5. Whether Election Promises Influence Respondents' Voting Decision**

Degree of Agreement	Total	Percentage
Strongly Agree	74	26.8%
Agree	70	25.4%
Undecided	29	10.5%
Disagree	45	16.3%
Strongly Disagree	58	21.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Source:** Computed from Field Survey

Seventy-four (74), representing 26.8% of the respondents, strongly agree with this assertion that election promises do influence voting decision of the electorate. Seventy (70), representing 25.4% agree; twenty-nine (29), representing 10.5% are undecided; forty-five (45), representing 16.3% disagree, while fifty-eight (58), representing 21.0% of the respondents strongly disagree with the assertion.

**Further Analysis of the Distributions of Respondents**

(i) To the question whether they are personally influenced by election promises made by politicians when deciding whom to

cast their votes for, Table 6 below shows the distribution of the opinion of the respondents by sex.

**Table 6. “Election Promises Influence Respondents’ Voting Decision”:  
Distribution of Responses by Sex**

Degree of Agreement	Number of Respondents		
	Male	Female	Total
Strongly Agree	20	54	74
Agree	25	45	70
Undecided	10	19	29
Disagree	32	13	45
Strongly Disagree	47	11	58
<b>Total</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>276</b>

**Source:** Computed from Field Survey

A statistical test of significance of the observations from Table 6 was carried out using the chi-squared analysis. The quantity  $\chi^2$  (Chi-squared) describes the magnitude of the discrepancy between theory and observations. It is, therefore, an appropriate test to use in this aspect of this study, to determine whether there is association between the opinion of respondents on election promise influence and their gender. (Please see Appendix 1 for the calculations).

This test revealed that the opinion of females with respect to the assertion that election promises influence respondents’ voting decision is significantly different from that of males at 5% level of significance. This result suggests that women are more influenced by insincere and deceptive election promises than men in taking voting decision.

- (ii) To the same question whether they are personally influenced by election promises made by politicians when deciding whom to cast their votes for, Table 7 below shows the distribution of the opinion of the respondents by educational qualification.

**Table 7: “Election Promises Influence Respondents’ Voting Decision”:  
Distribution of Responses by Educational Qualification**

Degree of Agreement	Number of Respondents				Total
	Below Secondary	Secondary School	Undergraduate / First Degree	Post-Graduate	
Strongly Agree	04	33	35	02	74
Agree	06	29	30	05	70
Undecided	03	15	10	01	29
Disagree	05	02	26	12	45
Strongly Disagree	02	08	38	10	58
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>276</b>

**Source:** Computed from Field Survey

A Chi-squared statistical test of significance of the observations from Table 7 was similarly carried out. (Please see Appendix 2 for the calculations). The test revealed that the opinions of respondents vary significantly with their educational qualification at 5% level of significance. This result suggests that less educated people are more influenced in their voting decisions by insincere and deceptive election

promises made by politicians and their parties than the more educated people.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made in the light of the findings from this study:

- (i) The public should hold politicians (and their parties) accountable for their promises. Appropriate Federal and State laws should be promulgated and made to work properly so that those elected into political offices properly account to the people;
- (ii) The people should not fall for all promises made by politicians, they should scrutinize such promises with the aim at sieving out the bogus and deceptive ones;
- (iii) There should be checks and balances made on election promises made by elected political office holders before or during their tenure in office;
- (iv) Politicians and their parties should realise that the electorate are skeptical of election promises made by them; they should therefore make more sincere promises in order to correct the negative impression people have, viz. that they make those promises, *ab initio*, insincerely. They should realise that the electorate cannot be deceived perpetually;
- (v) We should make election promises legally binding between candidates (and/or their parties) and the electorate; Afterall, Chief-Executive-Officers of companies do get fired for under-

delivery or poor performances. If a court finds that a defendant-promisor did not intend *ab initio* (at the time of making the promise) to fulfil his promise, it can subject him to both compensatory and punitive damages under the doctrine of promissory fraud or even sentence him to jail under the corresponding crime of false promise. It is morally wrong to make a promise which *ab initio* one does not intend to fulfil; it should also be made legally wrong.

## **CONCLUSION**

Unfulfilled political promises weaken the spirit of democracy. It is important for politicians to try to keep promises made during electioneering campaigns. Failure to do so can breed voter disenchantment, with both politicians and politics in general. It is also democratically dubious for politicians to flagrantly not fulfil their electoral promises. Many voters cast their votes with these electoral promises in mind; so, it is not an overstatement to regard breaking them as betrayal of voters' trust. Interestingly, in the course of writing this paper, it was widely reported on 05 April, 2021, in both the conventional and new media, that youths in the constituency of a Bauchi State politician (a Federal lawmaker), Hon. Musa Pali, attacked him. The angry youths accused him of making false promises for many years. They further said: "We will do everything possible to ensure he is not reelected in the forthcoming (2023) election". This is a warning signal to our politicians; they should watch it to avoid the wrath/revolt by the people.

Are there 'genuine' situations in which politicians could break their promises? I think there are, but even then, such situations should be



obvious to all and sundry as being inevitable and sensible decision to take. For instance, politicians sometimes have trouble squaring their ambitious campaign promises with the cold reality of governing, once in office. Candidates simply cannot know of all potential problems and limitations to the promises they make until they are elected and/or assume office, for instance knowing the true picture of the financial standing of the country/state (including indebtedness). Further, both economic and political conditions can change rapidly over the course of a politician's term in office. As the circumstances within which politicians made promises evolve, those promises can make less and less sense to implement/fulfil; for instance, negative turnaround in world economy which might adversely affect the revenue of the country/state (e.g. prices of the country's exports like crude oil, cocoa, gold, etc., exchange rates, etc.), outbreak of diseases and insurgency which might require immediate rechanneling of the country's resources (e.g. outbreak of Ebola and COVID-19 viruses, Boko Haram insurgency, etc.). In these cases, it is reasonable to think that a president (or governor) would not keep all his election promises as he would be rechanneling the limited resources available to him to address those pressing situations which were not envisaged nor planned for during the electioneering period when he made the promises. But then, these are understandable situations. However, voters should be smart enough to tell the difference between an incumbent politician who is meeting promises for the sake of his own re-election chances, and an incumbent who has governed to the best of his ability and is willing to defend potentially unpopular decisions, including breaking his own campaign promises when it is necessary and it makes sense to do so. In summary, politicians should do everything possible to keep their campaign

promises, and may break such promises only if it is in the public interest to do so.

### Appendix 1

Chi-squared is defined as:

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$$

where, "O" refers to the observed frequencies and "E" refers to the expected frequencies.

The expected frequencies are calculated using the 'formula':

$$E = \frac{RT \times CT}{N}$$

where, RT = Row total for the row containing the cell; CT = Column total for the column containing the cell; and N = Total number of observations.

For the observed values in Table 6, we have:

$H_0$  : There is no association between the opinion and sex of the respondents

$H_1$  : There is association between the opinion and sex of the respondents

The expected frequencies are calculated in the following Table:

**Table for Calculation of Expected Frequencies by Sex**

Degree of Agreement	Sex Distribution of Respondents		
	Male	Female	Total
Strongly Agree	$\frac{74 \times 134}{276} = 36$	$\frac{74 \times 142}{276} = 38$	74
Agree	$\frac{70 \times 134}{276} = 34$	$\frac{70 \times 142}{276} = 36$	70
Undecided	$\frac{29 \times 134}{276} = 14$	$\frac{29 \times 142}{276} = 15$	29
Disagree	$\frac{45 \times 134}{276} = 22$	$\frac{45 \times 142}{276} = 23$	45
Strongly Disagree	$\frac{58 \times 134}{276} = 28$	$\frac{58 \times 142}{276} = 30$	58
<b>Total</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>276</b>

Source: Computed from Table 6

The required Chi-squared is obtained from the following Table:

**Calculation of Chi-squared by Sex**

	Observed Values (O)	Expected Values (E)	(O - E)	(O - E) <sup>2</sup>	$\frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$
	20	36	-16	256	7.11
	54	38	16	256	6.74
	25	34	-9	81	2.38
	45	36	9	81	2.25
	10	14	-4	16	1.14
	19	15	4	16	1.07
	32	22	10	100	4.55
	13	23	-10	100	4.35
	47	28	19	361	12.89
	11	30	-19	361	12.03
<b>Total</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>276</b>			<b>54.51</b>

The Chi-squared calculated is 54.51. Meanwhile, from the Chi-squared Tables, the value at 5% (0.05) level of significance when degree of freedom,  $v = (r-1) (c-1) = (5-1) (2-1) = (4)(1) = 4$ , is 9.49.

Since the calculated  $\chi^2$  (54.51) is greater than that from Table (9.49), we reject the null hypothesis. We then conclude that there is association between the opinion and sex of the respondents, i.e., the voting decision of the electorate is influenced by their sex.

### Appendix 2

$H_0$  : There is no association between the opinion and educational qualification of the respondents

$H_1$  : There is association between the opinion and educational qualification of the respondents

The expected frequencies are calculated in the following Table:

**Table for Calculation of Expected Frequencies by Educational Qualification**

Degree of Agreement	Educational Qualification Distribution of Respondents				Total
	Below Secondary	Secondary School	Undergraduate/ First Degree	Post-Graduate	
Strongly Agree	5.4	23.3	37.3	8.0	74
Agree	5.1	22.1	35.2	7.6	70
Undecided	2.1	9.1	14.6	3.2	29
Disagree	3.2	14.2	22.7	4.9	45
Strongly Disagree	4.2	18.3	29.2	6.3	58
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>276</b>

Source: Computed from Table 7

The required Chi-squared is obtained from the following Table:

**Calculation of Chi-squared by Educational Qualification**

	Observed Values (O)	Expected Values (E)	(O - E)	(O - E) <sup>2</sup>	$\frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$
	4	5.4	-1.4	1.96	0.36
	33	23.3	9.7	94.09	4.04
	35	37.3	-2.3	5.29	0.14
	2	8.0	-6	36	4.50
	6	5.1	0.9	0.81	0.16
	29	22.1	6.9	47.61	2.15
	30	35.2	-5.2	27.04	0.77
	5	7.6	-2.6	6.76	0.89
	3	2.1	0.9	0.81	0.39
	15	9.1	5.9	34.81	3.83
	10	14.6	-4.6	21.16	1.45
	1	3.2	-2.2	4.84	1.51
	5	3.2	1.8	3.24	1.01
	2	14.2	-12.2	148.84	10.48
	26	22.7	3.3	10.89	0.48
	12	4.9	7.1	50.41	10.29
	2	4.2	-2.2	4.84	1.15
	8	18.3	10.3	106.09	5.80
	38	29.2	8.8	77.44	2.65
	10	6.3	3.7	13.69	2.17
<b>Total</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>276</b>			<b>54.22</b>

The Chi-squared calculated is 54.22. Meanwhile, from the Chi-squared Tables, the value at 5% (0.05) level of significance when degree of freedom,  $v = (r-1) (c-1) = (5-1) (4-1) = (4)(3) = 12$ , is 21.026.

Since the calculated  $\chi^2$  (54.22) is greater than that from Tables (21.026), we reject the null hypothesis. We then conclude that there is association between the opinion and educational qualification of the respondents, i.e., the voting decision of the electorate is influenced by their educational qualification.

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