VOTING PATTERNS AND MEDIA INFLUENCE IN NIGERIA'S FEDERAL CAPITAL TERRITORY (1999–2023): A MEDIA-HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

PADRÕES DE VOTAÇÃO E INFLUÊNCIA DA MÍDIA NO TERRITÓRIO DA CAPITAL FEDERAL DA NIGÉRIA (1999–2023): UMA ANÁLISE HISTÓRICA DA MÍDIA

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Abstract

The presidential elections in Nigeria receive massive scholarly coverage because of the exquisite nature of the socio-political environment of the country and the symbolic nature of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) in influencing electoral integrity. This paper examines how the FCT has voted since 1999, to 2023, with the discussion being whether the media has influenced the perception and choices of voters. It analyses electoral decisions in relation to changing trends, based on Agenda-Setting Theory. It examines the effects of identity politics, the influence of protest history, and exposure to both real and digital media. The qualitative design was utilised, with in-depth interviews with the stakeholders of the six FCT Area Councils and documentary sources. As the findings indicate, the FCT traditionally favoured ruling parties since 1999; however, the 2019 and 2023 elections resulted in a break, as determined by EndSARS, ethnicity, religion, and the mobilizing influence of the media, particularly social media. The paper concludes that the FCT is a reflection of the general trends of democracy in Africa, in which media power and identity politics are becoming progressively more dominant determinants of election results.

Keywords: Electoral Behaviour. EndSARS. Ethnicity and Religion. Media Influence and Presidential Elections.

Resumo

As eleições presidenciais na Nigéria recebem ampla cobertura acadêmica devido à natureza peculiar do ambiente sociopolítico do país e à importância simbólica do Território da Capital Federal (FCT) na integridade eleitoral. Este artigo examina como o FCT votou desde 1999 até 2023, discutindo se a mídia influenciou a percepção e as escolhas dos eleitores. Analisa as decisões eleitorais em relação às tendências em mudança, com base na Teoria do Agendamento. Examina os efeitos da política identitária, a influência do histórico de protestos e a exposição à mídia, tanto física quanto digital. Utilizou-se uma abordagem qualitativa, com entrevistas em profundidade com as partes interessadas dos seis Conselhos de Área do FCT e fontes documentais. Como indicam os resultados, o FCT tradicionalmente favoreceu os partidos governantes desde 1999; no entanto, as eleições de 2019 e 2023 resultaram em uma ruptura, determinada pelo movimento EndSARS, pela etnia, pela religião e pela influência mobilizadora da mídia, particularmente das mídias sociais. O artigo conclui que o Território da Capital Federal (FCT) reflete as tendências gerais da democracia na África, onde o poder da mídia e as políticas identitárias estão se tornando determinantes cada vez mais importantes dos resultados eleitorais.

Palavras-chave: Comportamento Eleitoral. EndSARS. Etnia e Religião. Influência da Mídia e Eleições Presidenciais.

1 INTRODUCTION

Elections form the foundation of democratic governance, and through elections, citizens can elect leaders and influence the popular policy (Norris, 2015). Other than giving legitimacy, accountability, and representation, elections are a peaceful transfer of power (Amila, 2019). Elections in Nigeria since the country returned to democracy in 1999 have reflected the complex socio-political realities of the country. The Federal Capital Territory (FCT) is especially a major electoral observation centre considering its cosmopolitan nature, ethnically diversified, and symbolic as the administrative capital of Nigeria.

Scholarship on elections in Nigeria has tended to focus on electoral violence, vote buying, and institutional weaknesses, and the 2019 and 2023 elections were the particular

subject of interest. Electoral violence is also very popular. According to Davis and Turnbull (2024), a paradox of constrained optimism is the expressed readiness to engage with the electoral system by young voters, who believe that the available democratic institutions should not be trusted, as there is constant violence. Similar incidents were recorded in the 2023 gubernatorial elections, which were meant to intimidate the opposition parties to turn up to vote (Centre for Democracy and Development, 2023). Similarly, the European Union Election Observation Mission (2023) indicated that violence compromised inclusiveness and put electoral legitimacy at risk in the long term.

Another systemic electoral vice is voting buying. Abdulrasheed *et al*. (2025) noted that in 2023, it was not merely pervasive but also systematic in the manifestation of vulnerability due to poverty and the lack of the capacity to enforce laws. According to Madueke and Enyiazu (2025), this trend misrepresents the idea of representation by giving the rich people an edge over the competitors of merit. It was already described as the persistent one by previous researchers (Vande, 2020), whereas more recent research cited its counterintuitive influence of increasing turnout in certain regions (Pan-African Journal of Governance and Development, 2024). Therefore, vote buying not only compromises the integrity of the electoral system but also transforms the participation.

These problems are complicated by institutional weaknesses. The 2022 Electoral Act brought changes, such as the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV), but they were not put into practice without delay. Banjo (2023) noted compliance was a problem with INEC, with Yiaga Africa (2024) recording delayed uploads, logistics issues, and inconsistent enforcement. International observers such as the EU (2023) and the Commonwealth Observer Group (2023) emphasized the importance of transparency, independent appointments, and effective sanctions. Madueke and Enyiazu (2025) place these issues in a larger institutional crisis in which reforms are in place in the law, but have not been effectively operationalised. Collectively, the literature identifies a vicious cycle where violence discourages participation, corrupted institutions encourage vote buying, and poor institutions reinforce them both, hindering democratic consolidation.

Although the subject of elections has been widely researched, the voting behaviours of the FCT are poorly studied. The FCT has a smaller population than many Nigerian states, and yet the outcomes are well-publicized and even considered as an indicator of the national political mood. Between 1999 and 2015, the FCT was a constant

supporter of ruling parties, but this changed in 2019 and 2023, as opposition parties made historic wins. These developments provide a ground on which the relationship between media influence, identity politics, and voter behaviour can be studied to determine the influence of these factors in determining the outcome of an election.

Democratic politics and media are still on the agenda of scholars. Langer & Gruber (2020) state that legacy media still can set the agenda, despite existing in a hybrid environment dominated by digital platforms, with the issues they discuss taking pre-eminence in the public. In their review of almost 500 studies, Lorenz-Spreen *et al*. (2022) find that online media has a paradoxical impact on political engagement (enhanced) and distrust and polarization (enhanced). Almakaty (2025) builds on this discussion in the context of algorithm-driven environments, demonstrating the redefinition of issue salience and candidate credibility by curation, which contributes to the topical applicability of the agenda-setting Theory in digital space.

In more recent democracies, like Kenya, Ghana, South Africa, and Nigeria, the combination of traditional and digital platforms makes the relationship even more complicated. Political actors are using digital tools to mobilize citizens, disseminate competing narratives, and threaten dominant parties (Bello *et al*., 2019; Oyebode and Orji, 2019). These dynamics are particularly strong in the FCT, which has a heterogeneous population and high media penetration, and which makes it an interesting area to study.

2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study aims to answer the following questions.

1. What have been the dominant voting patterns in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) during presidential elections between 1999 and 2023?
2. In what ways have traditional and digital media influenced voting patterns in the FCT over the same period?

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

The media have long been acknowledged as a central actor in shaping political communication and public opinion. Recent studies emphasize that in today's hybrid information environment, legacy media outlets continue to exert agenda-setting power even as digital platforms have gained prominence. Langer & Gruber (2020) demonstrate that traditional media still shape what issues dominate political debates, often indirectly influencing discourse on social media platforms. The rise of digital and algorithmic media, however, has altered how political information circulates. Research shows that recommender systems and algorithm-driven news feeds shape what issues are salient to voters by filtering and prioritizing information, thereby influencing perceptions of credibility and importance (Almakaty, 2025). Alongside agenda-setting, contemporary scholarship highlights the role of disinformation and manipulation in undermining democratic communication. The *Digital Democracy* report (Internews, 2023) underscores that disinformation campaigns and coordinated propaganda on platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp have tangible impacts on trust in institutions and electoral integrity. These findings suggest that media in both traditional and digital forms remain powerful, but in increasingly complex and sometimes problematic ways.

Recent work underscores that social media is no longer a peripheral campaign tool but a central arena where political information is produced, filtered, and amplified. Studies of recent election cycles in established democracies show that parties strategically shift platform use and messaging intensity, while feed and recommendation systems shape what voters actually see, with measurable effects on issue salience and attention (Jackson *et al*., 2024). This is further supported by evidence produced by the super-cycle of elections in 2024, stating that platform governance decisions (such as weaker fact-checking, harsher enforcement) and cross-platform disinformation networks may be used to skew the information ecosystem, giving certain narratives and actors an advantage in terms of visibility (Asplund *et al*, 2024).

Meanwhile, it has been theorized that algorithmic curation is related to the opportunity to persuade and the danger of mobilization. Large-scale audits and reviews note that coordinated networks on X/Twitter, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube can flood attention markets before votes, sometimes without a traceable line to outcomes but with clear intent to distort debate and trust (Lorenz-Spreen *et al*., 2022; The Guardian).

Country-specific studies around the 2023 Nigerian elections likewise document how social platforms fostered participation and message diffusion, while also creating channels for misinformation and tactical vote-seeking (Oga, 2023/2024; IJR Journal, 2025).

4 DEMOCRACY

The relationship between media and democracy has been studied extensively, with scholars emphasizing the media's ability to strengthen or weaken democratic legitimacy depending on how it operates. Daoust and Nadeau (2023) argue that citizens' satisfaction with democracy is shaped not only by electoral outcomes but also by the quality of electoral processes as mediated through information flows. Where electoral processes are perceived as fair and inclusive, democratic legitimacy tends to rise; however, when media coverage highlights irregularities, corruption, or manipulation, public trust declines. This resonates with findings by Lorenz-Spreen *et al*. (2022), who systematically reviewed nearly 500 studies on digital media and democracy, showing that while digital media can encourage participation and broaden access to political debate, it can also intensify polarization and reduce trust in institutions. More recently, Panagopoulou (2025) has drawn attention to the risks and opportunities of algorithmic media tools in democratic politics, warning that these tools could be weaponized to entrench authoritarian control or harnessed to promote inclusive deliberation. Collectively, the literature shows that democracy cannot be disentangled from the media environment in which it is practiced, with media functioning as both a safeguard and a potential threat to democratic health.

5 ELECTORAL BEHAVIOUR

Contemporary research links online visibility, sentiment, and network diffusion to participation and vote choice, while cautioning about causal inference. Reviews of election forecasting using social data find consistent correlational links between social signals and eventual vote shares, suggesting that media signals can proxy or sometimes shape electoral momentum (Gaur & Yadav, 2025). Beyond forecasting, experimental and observational studies show that changing media environments can affect participation habits and strategic voting, with affective evaluations of parties playing a growing role in

whether and how citizens turn out (Coppock *et al*., 2023). A parallel strand examines how polarization and misperceptions intersect with behaviour. Meta-analytic and mega-study evidence shows that many depolarization interventions produce only short-lived reductions in out-party hostility effects, which often fade within days, implying that durable shifts in behaviour may require changes to broader information incentives rather than one-off messages (Dias *et al*., 2024). These findings align with coverage of the latest meta-evidence highlighting the difficulty of sustaining attitudinal change in today's media environment.

The influence of media on electoral outcomes has become increasingly evident in both established and emerging democracies. Scholars have demonstrated that media visibility, framing, and sentiment have a significant impact on voter turnout and candidate choice. Gaur and Yadav (2025) reviewed the use of social media data in electoral forecasting, finding strong correlations between media coverage, online sentiment, and eventual vote shares. Similarly, comparative studies of campaign coverage, such as the *UK Election Analysis 2024* report, demonstrate that media framing of issues and candidates can mobilize certain groups while discouraging participation among others (Jackson *et al*., 2024). At the same time, studies caution that electoral outcomes are vulnerable to distortions when media environments are fragmented or manipulated. Raducha (2023), for instance, shows through computational models that electoral systems like single-round voting are more susceptible to media-driven manipulation than proportional systems, raising questions about the stability of democratic outcomes in the face of concentrated media influence. Evidence from contexts of electoral disinformation further illustrates how coordinated media campaigns can delegitimize results and foster post-election discontent (Internews, 2023).

The latest elections are a graphic example of how the locality of the voters determines the disposal of the votes in the form of seats. As revealed in analyses of the 2024 general election in the UK, changes in spatial support, metropolitan vs. town/rural belts, realignment in regions, third-party pockets filtered through single-member plurality rules had an effect that could only be partially described by Cores (National vote shares) (Jackson *et al*., 2024; Centre on Constitutional Change, 2024). The cartographic analysis of post-election patterns highlights groupings of partisan resilience and instability by pointing to the fact that geographic concentration and dispersion remain important in mediating representational bias and parliamentary influence.

The existence of Brexit-era spatial resettlement and the growing relevance of local economic and demographic characteristics in Partisan coalition structuring are also contributors to medium-term trends (Johnston *et al*., 2023). These geographic processes interact with both campaign strategy as well as media targeting traditional and digital, such that there is an uneven distribution of agenda focus and mobilization activities in space that strengthened territorial cleavage in the participation and choice.

Across recent cycles, identity-linked cues remain powerful predictors of vote choice and partisan attachment. New cross-national evidence suggests that identity, especially ethno-racial identity, continues to outstrip economic covariates as a predictor of partisan preference, challenging claims that contemporary electorates have moved decisively toward issue-only voting (Ganuthula & Balaraman, 2025). Case and comparative studies also show how identity-inflected negative partisanship encourages strategic coordination among opposition voters, even when positive attachment to a preferred candidate is weak.

Identity's behavioural imprint is further magnified by polarized media environments. Recent European and UK analyses connect affective polarization to shifts in turnout and tactical voting, while also noting institutional contexts that can intensify or dampen identity-driven hostility (Gidron *et al*., 2024; British Election Study analyses). Meanwhile, new meta-work on depolarization underscores how quickly attempts to recalibrate identity-coloured animus fade, reinforcing the need to address systemic drivers (You & Lee, 2024).

According to Bergh and Bjorklund (2011), ideology or social background is never a motivator of electoral behaviour, but group adherence. This can be interpreted to mean that voters tend to be biased towards their group identity rather than a conviction, leading to the significance of group dynamics in the determination of its outcomes. Although such is what explains the broad patterns of voting, one is left wondering how the group dynamics come into play in connection with an individual's choice.

Xia *et al*. (2011) studied the topic of strategic sequential voting over multiple issues and electoral periods, and revealed paradoxes in decision-making. Although their conclusions do not concentrate on Abuja, their results offer valuable theoretical applications in the concept of voting behaviour in a complicated political situation like that in Nigeria. Elections have also been associated with economic factors. An analysis of the 1996 and 2001 elections in the U.S. by McAvoy and Enns (2010) revealed that the

economic management matters significantly affected the voting patterns, irrespective of the incumbent, which the citizens rewarded or punished depending on their perceived performance. The view applies to the election process in Nigeria, where politics and the economy tend to influence the choice of voters. The importance of the media has become more important. The Bello, Inuwa-Dutse, and Heckel (2019) article discusses the role of social media campaigns in the 2019 elections in Nigeria and explains how social media influenced voter perceptions and voter turnout. In the same way, Alves *et al*. (2016) undertook a literature review on social media marketing and emphasized its ability to shape attitudes and behaviours, but expressed the need to conduct further studies regarding its electoral material in Nigeria. D'Arienzo *et al*. (2019) adopted the perspective further by emphasizing the addictive qualities of social media and how it can influence voter turnout trends.

Furthermore, misinformation is also a serious threat. In their review of the contribution by mainstream media to the spread of fake news, Tsfati *et al*. (2020) noted the risk of disinformation in influencing the electoral process. They maintained that media literacy programs are very important in fighting false information and protecting democracy.

Taken altogether, these research works demonstrate that the group identity, economic situation, effects of media, and disinformation influence the voting behaviour. Though the dynamics of groups and identities are still prevailing in Nigeria, the rise of social media and fake news emphasizes the dynamism of electoral politics, which demands more specific studies on its effects in such a setting as the FCT.

6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is based on Agenda-Setting Theory (AST) that describes how the media can shape the priorities of the masses by both deciding what people think about (first-level agenda setting) and what they think about them (second-level or attribute setting agenda setting). This theory emerged in the work of McCombs and Shaw (1972), and is based on the discovery of Walter Lippmann in 1922 of the media's influence on perceptions through the process of providing people with chosen images of reality.

McCombs and Shaw explored the correlation between voter perceptions of relevant issues and the content actually created in the media coverage in their seminal

work on the 1968 U.S. presidential campaign. They also discovered that the media had a significant effect on the issues that people considered the key ones of the campaign. McCombs and Shaw (1972) documented that through this means, the editors, journalists, and broadcasters are pivotal in determining the political reality: the intensity and frequency of coverage not only inform audiences about issues, but they also inform audiences about their relative importance. The latter was later stressed by Shaw (1979), that mass media do not always succeed in opinion transformation but are strong in providing direction in mass or popular consciousness. Newspapers, TV, and radio might not be credible in everything, but in constantly raising areas of concern, they create awareness of areas of concern that should be given priority in the discourse of the people.

Agenda-Setting Theory has been used with reference to this research in order to explain how the Nigerian media manipulated voters during the electioneering. Long-term reporting meant that the media constructed perceptions, political discussion, and agenda on issues like identity, governance, and protest movements that became the most important elements in voter decision-making.

7 MATERIALS/METHODS

The qualitative in-depth interview method was deployed as the method for this study. An in-depth interview is an open-ended kind of interrogation that enables the researcher to obtain detailed information about a topic from the respondents. In-depth interviews are a qualitative research method whose main objective is to explore in depth a respondent's point of view, experiences, feelings, and perspectives. The purposive sampling method was adopted to select six (6) participants from each of the six Area Councils that make up the FCT. The Area Councils are: Abaji, Bwari, Gwagwalada, Kuje, Kwali, and Abuja Municipal (AMAC).

Questions were asked about the two objectives of the study. The researcher also made use of other secondary sources to conclude. The data collected were presented in order of the objectives in a narrative format. Six respondents were interviewed. Of the six respondents, four were males, while two were females. Also, five of the respondents were Christians, while only one was a Muslim. Three said they are graduates and gainfully employed, two said they are petty traders, while one said he is a farmer. Also, four of the respondents responded to questions in English, while two responded in the Hausa

language. Additionally, while two of the respondents admitted that they are members of registered political parties, the remaining four said they are not members of any political party. It was also established that all six respondents have been voting in the FCT since the return to civil rule in Nigeria in 1999. All the respondents agreed that most of the time, religion, ethnicity, party affiliation, personality of the candidate, and inducements by way of "vote and cook soup" are some of the factors that determine voting outcome in the FCT. The respondents also contend that until the last two presidential elections, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), as a ruling party, had always won in the FCT during presidential elections. They, however, submitted that ruling parties sometimes lose at the Polling station situated within the Villa, the seat of power, arguing that often, that is the only result some analysts use to draw conclusions on the performance of presidential candidates in FCT during elections. When asked further about the reason for the change in voting pattern in the FCT in 2019 and 2023 against the ruling party, APC, five of the respondents attributed the outcome to the issue of religion, ethnicity, and party affiliation, with only one disagreeing. Five of the respondents attributed the Labour Party's win in the FCT in 2023 to the fallout of the EndSARS protest, the large population of Igbo in the FCT, and the APC's Muslim-Muslim ticket. They went further to submit that since the APC was birthed in 2015, an average Igbo man sees the party as representing the Islamic identity, adding that "since there was no LP in 2019 and Obi was the running mate on the PDP's ticket, the majority of Igbo in Abuja voted PDP that year." The respondents were unanimous in their submissions that their constant exposure to media messages in the build-up to presidential elections has a way of leading them to make decisions as to who or which party to vote for. However, in their estimation, they believed messages on social media and electronic media, like on radio and TV, were better penetrating than any other media messages.

8 RESULTS

Table 1

Analysis of Presidential Election Results in FCT (1999-2023)

FEDERAL CAPITAL TERRITORY 1999		
Candidate	**Party**	**Votes %**
Samuel Oluyemi Falae	AD-APP	39,788 40.2
Olusegun OBASANJO	PDP	59,234 59.8
Source: Electoral Geography		
FEDERAL CAPITAL TERRITORY 2003		
Candidate	**Party**	**Votes %**
Muhammadu Buhari	ANPP	99,220 38.0
Olusegun OBASANJO	PDP	130,243 49.9
Source: Electoral Geography		
FEDERAL CAPITAL TERRITORY 2011		
Candidate	**Party**	**Votes %**
Muhammadu Buhari	CPC	131,576 33.05
Jonathan	PDP	253, 444 63.66
Source: Electoral Geography		
FEDERAL CAPITAL TERRITORY 2015		
Candidate	**Party**	**Votes**
Muhammadu Buhari	APC	146, 399
Jonathan	PDP	157, 195
Source: Electoral Geography		
FEDERAL CAPITAL TERRITORY 2019		
Candidate	**Party**	**Votes**
Muhammadu Buhari	APC	152,224
ATIKU	PDP	259,997
Source: Reuters		
FEDERAL CAPITAL TERRITORY 2023		
Candidate	**Party**	**Votes**
Bola Ahmed Tinubu	APC	90,902
ATIKU	PDP	74,194
Peter Obi	LP	281,717
Source: BBC		

From the analysis above, ruling parties have only lost elections twice, that is, in 2019 and 2023, and all happened during the administration of Muhammadu Buhari as president under the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC). It is, however, important to note that the result of the 2007 presidential election for the FCT could not be traced anywhere. The 2007 election was one many adjudged to be "controversial," owing largely to the flaws that characterized the conduct and the outcome, coupled with the fact that the beneficiary, the late Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, admitted publicly that the election that brought him in, as president of Nigeria, was flawed. The late President was quoted in the *Nairaland Forum* edition of June 2007, barely two months after his election, as saying:

> The April elections had flaws and shortcomings, but they
> it is significant that for the first time in our history, we had
> a civilian-to-civilian transfer of power.

His predecessor, former President Olusegun Obasanjo, who had the flawed election conducted under his watch, equally had this to say, as captured by *The Guardian* of Monday, April 23, 2007:

> Our elections could not have been said to have been perfect.
> Cases of electoral fraud have been reported from parts of the country.
> But they had not had a significant impact on the outcome.
> I appeal to those who feel aggrieved to use the constitutional
> legal process to challenge the outcome.

It appears the controversies that dogged that election may be responsible for the unavailability of the results on the internet with regard to the FCT.

9 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The results of this study indicate that there has been a historical trend in the FCT, as the presidential elections held in 1999-2015 were consistently won by ruling parties, with an alternative situation emerging in 2019 and 2023, when the opposing parties succeeded. This continuous dominance of ruling parties in history is in line with the argument by Bergh and Björklund (2011) that group-adherence, and not ideology, should be predominant in the explanation of the electoral behaviour, as voters were likely to be influenced by the dominant political group in the national sphere. Nonetheless, the breaking of the trend in 2019 and 2023 may indicate the increased role of identity politics, religion, and ethnicity because Okolie *et al*. (2021) argue that voters tend to vote for candidates representing their community since they benefit themselves and build trust.

Media influence in generating election outcomes also came out well. The participants repeatedly pointed out the influence that social and electronic media have on influencing the choices of voters. It agrees with Bello *et al*. (2019), who noted the impact of social media campaign strategies on voter turnout in the 2019 elections in Nigeria. Likewise, Langer & Gruber (2020) and Almakaty (2025) show that both the traditional and digital media maintain their role of agenda-setting, which proves the theoretical

framing of this paper. Media dictated FCT voting patterns by establishing issue salience and exaggerating identity-related narratives.

Media-driven mobilisation and identity politics also interact in the case of the 2023 elections, which the effect that protest legacies (and especially EndSARS) that had on the election. Social media brought about new avenues of political participation, which is confirmed by Ogas (2024) and the International IDEA (2024). They demonstrated that digital media can mobilise citizens; at the same time, it further polarises them, as per Lorenz-Spreen *et al.* (2022). This duality follows Agenda-Setting Theory, according to which media describe not only issues but also frame them in ways that would create a sense of legitimacy and urgency.

But all the literature reviewed concurs well with the findings. As an example, Xia *et al.* (2011) are passionate about strategic sequential voting with respect to multi-issue settings, but the FCT case puts identity and protest-related decision-making in more emphasis than sequence-based or issue-related rationality. Similarly, electoral behaviour was associated with economic performance as a major determinant in McAvoy and Enns (2010) as compared to the FCT, where the key determinants were ethnicity, religion, and media discourses instead of economic stewardship. Such a deviation implies that economic factors are not so important in certain contexts, but identity politics and media effects are more impactful in the capital of Nigeria.

Overall, the findings are a good argument supporting Agenda-Setting Theory. The facts prove that the media could influence the views of the voters, the saliency of issues, and the availability and exposure of various candidates. The FCT patterns of election reveal that the results are not just a product of independent voters' determination, but rather that they are heavily influenced by media-driven discourses of identification. This proves the media coverage covered decidedly the mode of guiding the attention and framing of the stories that characterized the electoral behaviour.

10 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper discussed the media-historical analysis and voting pattern of the 2019-2023 presidential elections in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) in Nigeria. It discussed the trends in voting patterns over 25 years and why there were great changes in the 2019 and 2023 campaigns. Its objectives were to find out the voting pattern in the FCT

throughout this time, and to analyse the role played by the media in the formation of this pattern.

The relevant literature has been reviewed based on the conceptual, theoretical, and empirical perspectives, where Agenda-Setting Theory has been employed to contextualize the study. A qualitative design was assumed, and six stakeholders, on the six Area Councils of the FCT, were interviewed on an in-depth basis.

The reports had indicated that, despite the common belief, none of the ruling parties has lost presidential seats in the FCT since 1999, just twice. The voting pattern was the same until 2019, and the 2023 voting patterns showed an opposite result, with the opposition winning. The media impact was established as the key influence factor in deciding the electoral results, and the developments in recent elections were mostly influenced by EndSARS activism, ethnicity, religion, and party affiliation.

In the study, the recommendation is that the political parties and candidates should communicate better with the residents of the FCT so that competence and performance should eclipse ethnicity, religion, and pecuniary interests. Furthermore, because the power of media (especially social media) has been proven, parties must strategically integrate both digital channels with traditional media to draw supporters. The paper is narrow in its scope and approach. Further study must take note of correlation analysis to quantify the correlation between the variables like education, ethnicity, political affiliation, age, and voting decisions.

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Authors' Contribution

Both authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.