

THESIS

MEDIA FRAMING AND PUBLIC PERCEPTION: A CONTENT ANALYSIS
OF THE NATION AND THISDAY NEWSPAPERS' COVERAGE
OF THE 2023 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

MEDIA FRAMING AND PUBLIC PERCEPTION: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE NATION AND THISDAY NEWSPAPERS' COVERAGE OF THE 2023 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

This thesis explores the role of prominent Nigerian newspapers, *The Nation* and *ThisDay*, in helping to shape public perception of the 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria. With framing theory as a framework, the study conducts a detailed content analysis to examine how these newspapers portrayed political candidates, issues, and events during the election campaign.

Analyzing each newspaper's thematic and episodic frames, the research uncovers noticeable patterns in media framing strategies and discusses how they may impact public perception and understanding of the electoral process.

This study contributes to the broader understanding of media influence on political communication in Nigeria and highlights how newspapers may shape public opinion during critical democratic events.

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's 2023 presidential election served as both a litmus test for the nation's democratic institutions and an illustration of how media framing shaped public opinion during a pivotal political era. This thesis focuses on themes such as corruption, insecurity, ethnicity, religion, and candidate appropriateness while analyzing the function of media framing and its consequences on voter behavior through a content study of two well-known Nigerian newspapers. The results show how media framing - which emphasizes problems, highlights the advantages or disadvantages of candidates, and frames the election through various prisms - may play a critical role in influencing public opinion.

According to Verma and Sardesai (2014), the media may greatly influence public perception and the results of elections. They argued that the media played a significant role in the 2014 Indian elections. They believed the BJP won because of its strong media campaign and favoritism from the media. Some critics also contended that the media let Narendra Modi's PR team control how he was covered. This was partly because of the close ties between prominent media companies and Modi's financial supporters (Gandhi, 2013).

During elections, media outlets employ specific frames, such as emphasizing candidate personalities, campaign strategies, or policy issues, which may sway public perceptions and influence voter behavior. Researchers and policymakers have, therefore, expressed interest in what makes these frames so influential in shaping public perceptions. McCombs and Shaw's (1972) pioneering work in agenda-setting theory laid the foundation for understanding how media coverage influences public opinion by determining the salience of issues. Other scholars like Iyengar (1991) contributed significantly to the study of media framing and political communication by exploring how television news frames

political issues and shapes public perception. Gamson and Modigliani (1989) also examined how media frames influence public opinion on complex issues such as nuclear power while Snow and Benford (1988) studied how activists use framing to mobilize support and shape public perception.

Most significantly, Graber's book *Media Power in Politics* (2010) discusses the role of media in framing political events and shaping public attitudes while explaining how media framing influences political communication and public opinion. The works of these scholars, and many more, are the substructure upon which this thesis finds the nexus between media framing and the formation of public perception in the presidential elections in Nigeria, which were held on February 25, 2023.

When the media can affect the attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and decisions of individuals or groups who use its platforms within a society, this is referred to as *media influence* and can manifest in various forms that could be positive or negative on the individual and society. Media influence occurs through several mechanisms, including agenda-setting, framing, priming, and persuasion, and, according to Prior (2007), it could cause prospective voters to support candidates or parties who align with their preferred media outlets' ideological persuasion. Therefore, the media plays a pervasive role in elections, often shaping the public's opinion through the information it disseminates and influencing the voters' behavior. It is instructive to note that this impact could be positive or negative. It could worsen division, especially in fragile political systems like Nigeria's, and aid the dissemination of misinformation and disinformation, which could impact decision-making. To illustrate this, Southwell et al. (2020) used the example of the 2020 U.S.

presidential election, when a proliferation of false information on social media platforms hugely influenced voter perceptions and caused a contentious electoral environment.

Media organizations also present information that shapes how viewers/listeners understand issues. This is referred to as *media framing* and, as Entman (1993) asserted, could affect the veracity of a specific issue and impact the order, emphasis, and presentation of the information presented. He defines framing essentially as involving:

...selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspect of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described (Pg. 52).

Entman also argued that media frames have the power to determine four things, including:

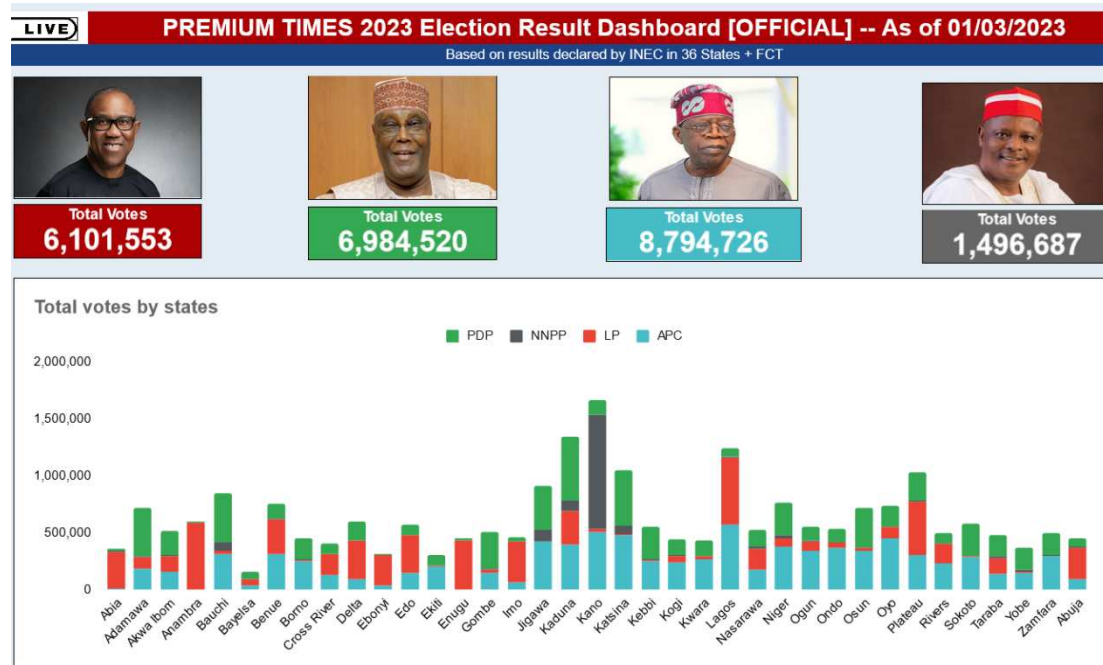
- What feature of the situation is being emphasized as the primary issue?
- Causal interpretation: What does one think are the apparent causes of the problem?
- Moral assessment: Is the problem deemed to be good or bad?
- Therapy suggestion: What remedies are suggested, and with what justification?

Entman used the Cold War to exemplify how frames can highlight, diagnose, evaluate, and prescribe a particular issue to support this point. He said, "The Cold War frame highlighted certain foreign events - say, civil wars - as problems, identified their source (communist rebels), offered moral judgments (atheistic aggression), and commended particular solutions (U.S. support for the other side)" (ibid).

The 2023 Nigerian presidential elections, a significant event in Africa's most populated country, had four major candidates leading a field of 18 hopefuls. The elections, which took place on February 25, 2023, were competitive and marked a new era for Nigerian politics and democracy. Although the top three candidates won the majority votes in 12 states each, Bola Ahmed Tinubu emerged as the winner of the election after satisfying the constitutional requirements of securing a simple majority and 25 percent of total votes cast in at least 24 of Nigeria's 36 states (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). He was thus sworn in as the fifth elected president since the return to civilian rule in 1999.

Tinubu, of the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC), polled a total of 8,794,726 (37.6 percent) to defeat Abubakar Atiku of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) who got 6,984,520 votes (29.9 percent) and Peter Obi of the Labour Party (L.P.) with 6,101,553 or (26.1 percent) of total votes cast while Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso of the New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP) came in a distant fourth with 1,496,687 (6.4 percent).

Table 1: Official results of the 2023 Presidential Elections



Source: Premium Times (2023) <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/2023-elections-presidential>

The Nigerian media has long been an active participant in the country's political development. It is renowned for its active role in fulfilling its duty and is arguably Africa's most accessible because of its proactive engagement in its responsibilities, particularly in shaping and influencing political processes (Seng & Hunt, 1986). Nigerians are avid consumers of news, with two-thirds (66.6%) saying they access news at least once a day, according to the U.S. Agency for Global Media (2014). About 72.8 percent of this number are men, and 72.4 percent live in urban areas, so the media had a critical role to play in presenting the messages of the various political parties and the leading candidates' images to the voting public, half of which were young voters between the ages of 18 and 34. The media's role in discharging this duty was therefore critical in a country riven by ethnic mistrust and religious cleavages and a political system which Joseph (1987) described as

being characterized by primitive patronage syndrome, where political actors capture state power and use it to advance the well-being of their respective ethnic or religious groups. Also, a critical reason why the election was important was the youth demography, estimated at 7.28 million, or 76%, of the 9.4 million newly registered voters, who were first-time voters desirous of a better country (Akinmoju, 2023).

Nigeria boasts one of Africa's most vibrant media industries, with radio and television operating at both federal and regional levels across all 36 states (BBC News, 2023). Adeyemo (2023) describes the media landscape as dynamic and constantly evolving, embracing new digital formats and channels while preserving its traditional legacies. This diversity and adaptability of the Nigerian media landscape add a layer of complexity to the research, making it an intriguing subject of study. Therefore, the primary goal of this thesis is to investigate how media contents are framed in such a way that they influence public perception and to see how this played out in the Nigeria elections of 2023. This analysis examines if and how the framing of election-related news, narratives, and political figures' portrayals influenced the voting public's perception of the presidential candidates and their voting patterns. To do this, the study analyzes two newspapers, *The Nation* and *ThisDay* newspapers, two daily publications with a broad national presence in all the 36 states in the country and a large readership base, and both privately owned but with divergent ideological biases. While *The Nation*, owned by Bola Tinubu who eventually won the election and is the current president of Nigeria, claims to be progressive and committed to the fundamental principles of federalism (The Nation, n.d.), *ThisDay* is reputed for its conservatism even if it claims to be an industry agent of change and innovation (ThisDay,

n.d.). This bias is directly attributed to their owners' personalities and political persuasions, reflected in their election coverage.

Consequently, the research is focused on the following four areas:

1. Ownership Structures of Media: The ownership structures of media can vary significantly, influencing their content, perspective, and overall role in society. Some common ownership structures include:

a. **Private Ownership:** This could either be owned by individuals or families. For example, Rupert Murdoch's Fox Corporation (Stelter, 2019), and NDTV of India, owned by Prannoy Roy and Radhika Roy (Thakurta, 2012)

b. **Public Ownership:** This type of ownership could be government-owned, like the BBC in the U.K., or community-owned and operated by nonprofit organizations or community groups such as the Radio Popolare in Italy (Meijer & O'Sullivan, 2005; Radio Popolare, n.d.).

c. **Hybrid Ownership:** A third variant of ownership is media outlets owned through partnerships between different entities. For example, *The Washington Post* is owned by Jeff Bezos' personal investment firm (Noam, 2009).

One goal is to examine the ownership structures of media organizations that covered the 2023 elections, including their connections to candidates and/or political parties and how this impacted the 2023 election.

2. Content Framing Analysis: Any discussion of content framing analysis in elections and public perception will typically involve studying how the media frame election-related

issues and candidates and how these frames influence the public's perception of such issues. Chong and Druckman (2007), Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007), and Iyengar and Kinder (1987) all offer comprehensive views of how framing analysis applies to elections and public perception, highlighting its significance in understanding media effects on political behavior and attitudes. Consequently, the research examines how news about the election was presented in different media, analyzes the narratives and how the candidates were portrayed, and examines the election issues that were given more prominence over others.

3. Evaluating Correlations: The relationship between media framing, media ownership, and public perception is complex and multifaceted. While media framing involves the way information is presented to the audience and its influence on how events and issues are interpreted (Entman, 1993), media ownership refers to who controls the media outlets, which can impact the content and framing due to potential biases or agendas (McChesney, 1999). Public perception is shaped by the information consumed from these media sources, affecting opinions, attitudes, and behaviors (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). This thesis evaluates the correlations between these three elements, exploring how ownership structures influence framing practices and if these frames subsequently shape public perception. It also draws links between ownership patterns and content-framing strategies employed in the 2023 elections and determines how ownership structures affected news frames' choice, prominence, and presentation.

4. Effect on Public Perception: The objective is to investigate the possible effects of deliberate content-framing strategies on the democratic process during the election. Several scholars have asserted that the framing of news stories has a direct impact on public

perception. Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley (1997) found that framing affects the salience of issues, making some issues more prominent in the public's mind than others. Iyengar and Kinder (1987) claim that how events and individuals are framed can influence their perceived legitimacy. Media framing can either enhance or undermine the credibility of political actors, social movements, and policy proposals. Framing can also evoke specific emotional responses, influencing public perception and attitudes. Emotional frames, such as those emphasizing fear, anger, or empathy, can mobilize public opinion and shape political and social behavior (Gross & D'Ambrosio, 2004).

In the context of the Nigerian election, various surveys were conducted before and during the elections to measure the impact of media frames on the perception of the voting public about the candidates and other issues. A survey by TechCabal (2023) highlighted the significant role of social media in Nigeria's elections, noting that out of 221 million Nigerians, 31.6 million are social media users, predominantly youth. Another survey by University West (n.d.) examines the role of media framing in shaping the legitimacy of Nigerian elections. These surveys suggested that young voters relied on Social Media platforms like Facebook, TikTok and Twitter to monitor political discussions, and that hashtags such as *#NigeriaDecides2023* were among the most popular for tracking election contents. Peter Obi and his vice-presidential candidate Yusuf Baba-Ahmed Datti also effectively used social media through the hashtag *#ObiDatti2023* to gain the trust and support of younger and first-time voters (Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 2023). The Center for Journalism Innovation and Development also conducted a survey which revealed that the more active a user is on social media, the stronger the opinions they will hold on political issues which is shaped by the kind of content they are exposed to (Centre for Journalism

Innovation and Development, 2023). Another survey found that disinformation was prominent before and during the election with various paid platforms and sometimes AI-generated contents pervasive in the media space to either reinforce existing biases or create alternative truths. Efforts to fact-check such content had little impact especially in opinions bordering on ethnic, political, and religious lines (Uwakwe et al., 2023).

1.1 Research Statement

The study aims to investigate the relationship between media framing and public perception during the 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria. Media framing, a critical component of media studies, involves presenting information to influence audience interpretation and understanding (Entman, 1993). This research analyzes how two Nigerian media outlets framed the presidential election campaign and will discuss how the media frames possibly impacted public perception and voter behavior.

The objectives of this research, therefore, are:

1. To Identify Dominant Media Frames: The study identifies the predominant frames used by various Nigerian media outlets during the 2023 presidential election campaign. These frames include economy, corruption, ethnicity and religion, and candidate framing, among others (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Aalberg et al., 2012; Druckman, 2004).

2. To Analyze Ownership Influence: Bola Tinubu, one of the contestants and eventual winner of the election, is the owner of *The Nation* newspaper, one of Nigeria's most prominent media outfits. This study explores if and how ownership of media structures influence the framing of election-related news and its outcome because concentrated media

ownership leads to biases in framing, thus reflecting the owners' political and economic interests (McChesney, 1999; Bagdikian, 2004).

3. To Assess Public Perception: The study assesses how these media frames shaped public perception and attitudes towards the presidential candidates and the election process. This includes examining the impact of media framing on issue salience, candidate image, and voter engagement (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Nelson et al., 1997). This study employs the works of scholars on the Nigerian election such as Luckscheiter (2022) to explain how bots, disinformation, and algorithmic biases shaped public perception of the candidates and top issues during the election.

4. To Evaluate the Correlation: The research evaluated the correlation between media framing, media ownership, and public perception. It investigated how ownership patterns influenced framing practices and how these frames affected public attitudes and voting behaviors (Gilens & Hertzman, 2000; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

Understanding the relationship between media framing and public perception is crucial for comprehending Nigeria's electoral politics dynamics. The 2023 presidential elections provided a pertinent case study due to their significance in shaping Nigeria's political future. By analyzing media content and public responses, this research contributes to the broader discourse on media influence in democratic processes, particularly in emerging democracies like Nigeria's.

One of the numerous issues surrounding content framing is the pervasive influence of media ownership. McChesney (1999) reckons that democracy may suffer if media

ownership is concentrated in a few hands as this may result in prioritizing private profit over public interest, reducing the variety of viewpoints and voices in the media. Chomsky and Herman (1988) claim that media content is shaped by corporate and governmental interests, for whom they serve as propaganda outlets. The duo identified five filters through which media content must pass: owners, size of advertising revenue, news sourcing, negative responses from news content users, and ideology. These filters ensure that media content defers to the will of elite owners who can manufacture favorable consent from media users. According to Bagdikian (1983), a few large corporations now own media organizations, including newspapers, television networks, radio stations, and publishing houses in the United States of America. While these corporations can provide the resources to run them, there is a tendency to diminish alternative viewpoints and undermine competition in the industry. Others raised concerns about how news stories are framed by emphasizing certain aspects and how this may affect audience perceptions (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), while Strömbäck & Esser (2014) worried about the potential for biased reporting due to specific ownership interests that may be a source of concern. This pervasive influence of ownership leaves media users at the mercy of media framers, potentially skewing public perception and decision-making, particularly on issues, candidates, and events during an election or on related social issues (Lasswell, 1948).

Furthermore, to get a better understanding of the implications of different forms of media ownership, scholars such as Razali and Delliana (2020), McAllister and Napoli (2008), as well as Reese et al. (2006) interrogated the connection as well as differences between chain and independent forms of media ownership. They debated ownership in the context of the diversity of content and the overall functioning of democratic societies, the

impact of ownership on the quality of programs, and potential differences in editorial decision-making based on ownership structure. Other studies compared the manifestation of bias, framing, and impact between chain ownership and independently owned media organizations (Croteau et al., 2019). Both *The Nation* and *ThisDay* fall under chain ownership because they are members of media conglomerates. *The Nation* is part of the media chain owned by Mr Tinubu, including other media organizations like *TVC* and radio stations *Max Radio* and *Adaba FM* (Alabi, 2020). On the other hand, *ThisDay* is the flagship newspaper of Leaders & Company Ltd, a member of the ThisDay Media Group and Arise News media conglomerate owned by Nduka Obaigbena, a former journalist, prominent businessman and politician with links to politically-exposed persons (ThisDay, n.d.).

Despite its significance, critical gaps still need to be addressed in the literature on how media framing shapes public perception of specific issues and politics. While many studies focus on the immediate effects of media framing, there is little study on the long-term impact of framing. Secondly, it is imperative to have research that looks at the whole framing process—from creating media messages to their impact on public opinion and behavior (Won & Frederick, 2017). Thirdly, there is a gap in the literature regarding the ethical implications of media framing and the responsibility of journalists and media organizations in shaping public perception.

The research, therefore, addresses this gap by interrogating the many factors responsible for framing media content and how this impacts public perceptions, which in turn affect political behavior. To do this, the study contextualizes the 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria as a case study and, by aggregating relevant data and theoretical

frameworks, will significantly contribute to the field and help bridge the knowledge gap between media consumption and content framing.

1.2 Research Questions

According to Altheide's work on media and social control, particularly his book "*Media Logic, Social Control, and Fear*" (2002), media framing contributes to the construction of social reality and influences public perception of social issues. Thus, the following would be the primary research questions:

- i. How did *The Nation* and *Thisday* newspapers frame the major presidential candidates during the 2023 Nigerian elections, and what were the dominant frames used?
- ii. To what extent did *The Nation* and *ThisDay* newspapers prioritize the dominant frames and candidate attributes in their coverage of the 2023 Nigerian presidential election?
- iii. What differences can be observed in the framing strategies employed by *The Nation* and *Thisday* Newspapers in their portrayal of presidential candidates?
- iv. How did the frequency and prominence of coverage of specific candidates by *The Nation* and *ThisDay* newspapers shape the presentation of these candidates during the 2023 Nigerian elections, and what potential implications might this have for public perception?
- v. In what ways did Tinubu's ownership of *The Nation* influence the newspaper's coverage of the 2023 Nigerian elections?

1.3 Rationale and Significance of Research

This study's justification is as complex as its importance since it significantly influences understanding the potentially symbiotic or constricting relationship between media framing and consumption. The following is a summary of the reasons why this research is necessary:

- i. **Understanding Media Influence on Public Perception:** Media framing theory posits that media content influences how audiences perceive and understand political events and candidates (Entman, 1993). By analyzing how *The Nation* and *ThisDay* newspapers frame the 2023 Nigerian presidential elections, the study uncovers the specific frames used and their implications for public perception.
- ii. **Impact on Democratic Processes:** Elections are pivotal moments in democratic societies, and the media play a crucial role in shaping voter attitudes and behaviors. Understanding media framing during elections provides insights into how media narratives can influence electoral outcomes and public trust in democratic institutions (Iyengar, 1991).
- iii. **Comparative Analysis of Media Coverage:** Comparing how two prominent newspapers in Nigeria—*The Nation* and *ThisDay*—frame the elections provides insights into media diversity and bias. Comparative studies help reveal patterns in media framing across different outlets and their impact on public opinion (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989).
- iv. **Informing Media Practices and Ethics:** The research findings can inform media professionals about their role in responsibly shaping public opinion. Understanding effective

framing strategies and their effects on audience perceptions can guide ethical journalism practices and promote balanced reporting (Graber, 2010).

v. **Contribution to Academic Scholarship:** The research contributes to theoretical understanding and empirical evidence in media studies. By examining media framing in the context of Nigerian elections, the study enriches academic discourse on media effects, agenda-setting, and framing theories (Tankard & Paluck, 2016).

vi. **Implications for democracy:** Media ownership affects content and democracy. According to Wasburn (1995), this is important since the media strengthens democracy, particularly in weak political systems like Nigeria, still beset with socio-political challenges, including a weak bureaucracy and vast corruption that continues to subvert government efficiency. Adejumobi (2011) advanced the argument that the near-total absence of accountability and transparency in governance is directly attributable to the malaise of corruption. Ethnic divisions, fueled by the country's colonial past and post-independence political unrest, have continued to provoke conflicts and stalled efforts towards national unity (Suberu, 2001).

1.4 Contributions to the Field

This study is an attempt to find a media interpretation for a political phenomenon. As such, it heralds numerous contributions to political science and media communications.

Firstly, media communications research provides a specific contextual understanding by concentrating on a case study, in this case, the Nigerian elections of 2023. Such a study

will improve the observation, measurement, and understanding of media effects in a political context.

Secondly, studies of this kind shed light on how the media behaves before and during elections. Because of this, we may confidently infer interpretations from specific news items based on how the public perceives issues because of how the content was framed (de Vreese, 2009; Soroka & Wlezien, 2022).

Thirdly, by examining content framing during elections, we also learn more about how the media shapes the way political parties, candidates, and topics are presented and how this eventually affects public perception and preferences for election results.

Since the media is fundamental to democratic governance, it is imperative to comprehend how it frames content. The media is crucial in informing the public and influencing how they view political issues and politicians. As a pivotal event in Nigeria's democratic history, the 2023 general elections offer a chance to examine how the media framed content that influenced public opinion and impacted election results.

This study will, therefore, further the political science sub-field of political communication studies. The conclusions will also add to the body of knowledge regarding the function of the media in democratic processes. Furthermore, it will inform policymakers about the importance of particular media laws in providing impartial election coverage and enhancing the democratic process. The study's conclusions will also help newsrooms and media practitioners in the field and newsrooms, as well as in academic discourses and policy interventions.

CHAPTER II - BACKGROUND

2.1 Nigerian Political System

There are three main periods in Nigeria's political development. Firstly, during the pre-independence phase from Great Britain in 1960, Nigeria held federal elections, and though fiercely disputed, the nation's democratic experiment began with the installation of the first set of officials. However, according to Falola and Heaton (2008), political unrest and ethnic conflicts during the First Republic contributed to the government's fall in 1966 and the start of a string of military takeovers. Political instability and successful coups further eroded trust and exacerbated ethnic tensions (Ifeoma, 2004; Nwanze, 1997). Moreover, there were anti-Igbo pogroms in the northern part of the country, which led the eastern region to declare independence in 1967, provoking a three-year civil war (Coleman, 2015; Gowon, 1989) and an extension of military rule into the late 1970s.

Secondly, a return to civil rule program, which ended 13 years of military dictatorship and saw Shehu Shagari emerge as Nigeria's first elected president, established the Second Republic in 1979. A second four-year term began in 1983 for the incumbent despite widespread irregularities, including over-rigging and the ruling National Party of Nigeria's internal struggle over the 1987 presidency (Hart, 1993). After another military coup overthrew the government three months into its second term, Nigeria faced political unrest marked by coups and leadership changes for the next 16 years until a new democratic regime came to power in 1999. Lastly, the third phase of Nigeria's political development effectively began in May 1999 when a new democratic journey kicked off, with periodic

elections in four-year intervals until 2023, when then-incumbent President Muhammadu Buhari's ended his second four-year term (Adejumobi, 2007).

For Africa's most populous country, with an estimated 230 million people and the continent's largest economy (Central Intelligence Agency, n.d.), the outcome of the 2023 elections was necessary for several reasons. Firstly, the elections across the 36 states and Federal Capital Territory were predicted to be a crucial test for democracy (Damon, 2023) and a chance to reset the nation (Aina, 2023). These sentiments were a fallout of the disappointment with the outgoing government of Muhammadu Buhari, which had failed to arrest the country's slide into backwardness due to perceived gross incompetence and apparent lack of political will to tackle security issues, including the havoc-wrecking terror group Boko Haram and its breakaway faction, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), in the country's northeast. Secondly, Hassan (2023) described the elections as "a defining moment for the country's economy, democratic institutions, identities, and security for years to come" and one which Egbejule (2023) observed as the first time since 1999 that a former Army general would not be on the ballot.

The reasons for this pre-election anxiety were not far-fetched. One was the disaffection caused by the perceived unresolved agitations that arose from the October 2020 *#EndSars* protests. That year, younger Nigerians had rebelled against the oppression and extrajudicial killings committed by the Police Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), which led to massive destruction of lives and properties. Some of the youth's grievances included a seven-month Twitter (now X) ban and an eight-month strike at public universities (Egbejule, *ibid*). Essentially, the *#EndSARS* protests, which began with a focus on police brutality,

were to extend to other dimensions of social ills such as corruption, human rights violations, and underdevelopment in Nigeria (George, 2020).

This unrest, which resulted in economic losses amounting to an estimated USD 486.4 million (Atlas Magazine, 2021), coupled with a faltering economy that was spiraling out of control and responsible for growing unemployment as well as widespread insecurity, had resulted in over 10,000 deaths and over 5,000 kidnappings in the final year before the election (Crisis Watch, 2023). This raised hopes that the election would see a transfer of power from one civilian ruler to another for only the third time in the nation's democratic history.

2.2 Setting the stage for the Elections

Three major issues were up for debate in the run-up to the 2023 elections: a troubled economy, deep-seathed corruption in high places, and insecurity, which had rendered large swathes of the country ungovernable.

The first issue was the economy. Before the 2023 presidential elections, the Nigerian economy faced significant challenges of high inflation, unemployment, and economic instability. As Africa's largest economy, Nigeria has been grappling with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which severely disrupted economic activities and exacerbated pre-existing vulnerabilities. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria's inflation rate surged to around 15.63% in December 2021, driven by rising food and energy prices (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). The unemployment rate, put at 33.3percent, also remained alarmingly high, particularly among the youth, reflecting the economy's inability to create sufficient jobs for its growing population (World Bank, 2022¹). As the presidential

elections approached, the state of the economy remained a critical issue for the electorate, influencing public sentiment and expectations for the incoming administration.

Second was the burning issue of corruption. In the lead-up to the 2023 elections, the issue of corruption was at the forefront of political discourse. Candidates and political parties frequently accused one another of corruption, each promising to combat this issue if elected. Despite these promises, many Nigerians remained skeptical about the prospects for genuine reform, given the historical precedence of unfulfilled anti-corruption pledges by previous administrations (Amundsen, 2010). Allegations of vote-buying, voter intimidation, and manipulation of election results marred the electoral process itself. These practices compromised the integrity of the electoral process and perpetuated a cycle of corruption that undermines democratic governance. Scholars have highlighted that systemic corruption is deeply entrenched in Nigeria's political landscape, affecting all levels of government and public administration (Smith, 2007), and this sentiment was reflected in low voter turnout and a pervasive sense of cynicism about the ability of the political system to deliver meaningful change (Suberu, 2001).

A third issue, initially not considered of much importance but which was to snowball later and overshadowed every other issue, was the critical examination of the personalities of the leading contestants, according to Adetayo, Chughtai, and Egbejule (2023). An unrelenting media campaign highlighted each of the candidates' distinct backgrounds, political experiences, and visions for the country and provided deep insights into their qualifications, political strategies, and public perceptions. Among the front-runners were Bola Tinubu of the All Progressives Congress (APC), a former governor of Lagos State -

Nigeria's wealthiest state - and a significant political figure within Nigeria. His tenure as governor is often credited with transforming Lagos into a significant economic hub and showcasing his administrative capabilities (Ayeni, 2023). However, his campaign was bogged down by controversy. Tinubu faced allegations of corruption and questions about his health and age, which his opponents leveraged to challenge his suitability for the presidency (Lewis, 2022). Despite these challenges, his extensive political network and influence within the APC gave him a robust platform to project his vision for Nigeria.

Atiku Abubakar of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) has a long history in Nigerian politics, having served as vice president from 1999 to 2007. Known for his business acumen and advocacy for economic reforms, Atiku's campaign focused on economic development and restructuring Nigeria's federal system (Ogunmodede, 2018). However, like Tinubu, Atiku's political career has been marred by allegations of corruption and questions regarding his commitment to anti-corruption measures (Bello-Imam, 2004). These allegations created a mixed perception among the electorate, balancing his experience and economic expertise against concerns about his integrity.

The third candidate, Peter Obi of the Labour Party, presented himself as a candidate for change, focusing on transparency, youth engagement, and economic prudence. Obi, a former governor of Anambra State, is widely respected for his governance style, emphasizing fiscal responsibility and infrastructural development (Uzochukwu, 2021). His campaign resonated particularly with young voters and those disillusioned with the traditional political elite. The first two candidates, Tinubu and Atiku, were regarded as part of the establishment that had brought the country to its knees, so they were not as popular as

Obi, who was relatively younger and more popular with the youth demography even though he had left the PDP less than a year to the presidential elections to pursue his ambition on the ticket of the Labour Party (Premium Times, 2022). There were tremendous expectations that the wildly popular Obi may pull off an unlikely victory because he had the backing of the youth, who constituted the largest voting demography. Even though they are anything but submissive, they united to form a base of support for him and called themselves the *Obidients*—a pun on the name of their principal (Obadare, 2023). Despite his appeal, Obi faced criticism over his inability to unite a fragmented opposition and provoked concerns about whether his vision could translate into actionable policies in Nigeria's complex political environment.

Thus, of the 18-odd candidates in the elections, only three were considered capable of winning, although a fourth, Rabiun Musa Kwakwaso, became a 'wildcard' against popular expectations (Egbejule & Olurounbi, 2023). This forensic examination of the leading candidates highlights the multifaceted nature of the 2023 presidential elections, underscoring the interplay of records, public perceptions, and political strategies in shaping electoral outcomes. Each candidate's past political engagements and personal histories significantly shaped their campaigns and influenced voter expectations.

2.3 Nigerian Media system

In discussing the Nigerian media system, the research will explore three major themes of historical development, ownership, and funding. The study will discuss these three broad themes in detail.

2.3.i Historical development of the Nigerian media

A nuanced knowledge of Nigeria's media system's past, present, and future will help to better appreciate its evolution, challenges, and social contributions. According to Olorunnisola (2012), studying the evolution of Nigerian media aids in understanding how the media has changed throughout time in response to political, economic, and social shifts, thus affecting its ability to promote democracy and the advancement of the country.

Aro (2011) traced the effective birth of the Nigerian media to the printing on 3rd December 1859 of the "*Iwe Iroyin fun awon Egba ati Yoruba*," loosely translated to mean "A Newspaper for the Egba and Yoruba Ethnic Nations," by a Christian Missionary named Reverend Henry Townsend in what is today's Abeokuta, the capital city of Ogun State, a sub-national unit in the southwestern part of the country. The aim of establishing the newspaper, according to Malemi (1999), was to promote literacy and build up elites among the then Egba people, and not to further the political interests of the then emerging set of educated elite who had begun taking an interest in how the British colonial government was running their country. The '*Iwe Iroyin*' would not enjoy the patronage of the educated elite, which saw it as pro-establishment. Its eventual demise led to the emergence of other newspapers like "Lagos Time and Gold Coast Advertiser, Lagos Observer, The Eagle and Lagos Critic, The Mirror, The Nigerian Chronicle, The Lagos Standard, Lagos Weekly Record, African Messenger, The West African Pilot, Nigerian Tribune (Abati, 1998) with most of the newspapers owned by members of the political class.

This trend of media ownership continued until independence in 1960 when the owners used their platforms and the voice it afforded them to further their political interests

under the guise of fighting the colonial government. Politicians like Obafemi Awolowo quickly set up the Nigerian Tribune in 1949 as a counter-force to Nnamdi Azikiwe's West African Pilot, a significant player in the nationalist struggles of the post-World War 2 years. Abati, while making the connection between the press and politics, reckons that the media unwittingly became a tool in the quest for power as:

"...opposing power centers which feel threatened by its dynamism invariably seek to control the press through several means with politicians resorting to misuse of mass media to achieve their selfish desires. From colonial times, it has been treated as a significant power tool." (ibid).

Post-independence, significant changes occurred to the media's ownership structure and climate, which has led to concerns about how impartial and apolitical the media can be when presenting stories. Before 1992, when the broadcast sector was deregulated under Gen. Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida's military dictatorship, Nigeria's media sector was a government monopoly. The deregulation, promulgated through Decree 38 of 1992, opened the door for private entities to enter the market, even though the federal and state governments continue to play a significant role as regulators of standards and media owners. The Nigerian Television Authority prides itself on being "Africa's largest television network" (Servicom Corner, n.d.), the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), and the Voice of Nigeria (VON) are all owned by the federal government. Therefore, understanding how public opinion and perceptions are molded requires a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between media ownership and content framing.

The Nigerian Press Council mandates members to observe a 15-point Code of Ethics, which includes editorial independence, accuracy and fairness, and respect for privacy, non-disclosure of sources, non-discrimination, avoidance of plagiarism, and copyright (Nigerian Press Council, n.d). These broadly mirror the four cardinal values of the US-based Society of Professional Journalists (2014), which admonishes journalists to seek and report the truth, minimize harm, act independently, and be transparent and accountable in performing their duties. Both organizations encourage journalists to adhere to these ideals.

However, ownership of a media organization may suggest that journalists will only observe these cardinal principles in the breach while carrying out their duties because the owner has final decision-making authority when the profession's ethics conflict with the overriding interests of media owners. A well-known dictum says he who pays the piper calls the tune to be played.

2.3.ii Media Ownership in Nigeria

Media professionals and academics have long debated media ownership structures, and content framing as an examination of media ownership provides insight into how media power is concentrated and how this affects editorial freedom, dissent, and media pluralism. According to a study by Onyebadi (2017), ownership structures should be carefully considered when evaluating the degree of media freedom and the capacity of the media to act as watchdogs in democratic countries. Ajilore et al. (2012) also raised the subject of media ownership and its influence on objectivity in the Nigerian socio-political milieu. Quoting a respondent in his study, Okwuchukwu (2014) articulated the fear of job security for the journalist when and where the interest of the owner is threatened:

You risk losing your job if you give out unfavorable information about government activities, while the reporter in public media that makes use of such unfavorable information also runs the risk of losing their job. However, private media organizations that come across such information normally use them, but sometimes the reporter could be compromised (Pg. 43).

As of September 2021, there were approximately 625 operational broadcast stations in Nigeria, despite a sharp decline in television audiences and newspaper readership in recent years (Adegboyega, 2021). This decline is attributed to the economic downturn and the emergence of digital media, which popularized online platforms like YouTube and blogs. By conservative estimates, Adeyemo (ibid) reckons that:

...there are still around 100 national and local print titles, of which the best-known include The Punch, The Nation, Vanguard, The Guardian, and The Premium Times. Television and radio remain critical sources of information, especially for those that are not online, but internet access is growing fast. Nigeria hit 122.5 million -more than half of the total population - Internet users as of January 2023, according to DataReportal, and Nigerians have been quick to adopt a wide range of social media platforms. Meta-owned products such as Facebook and WhatsApp remains most widely used for news, followed by Twitter and YouTube. The Messaging service Telegram

has proliferated in recent years, and Nigeria's youthful population is now vigorously embracing short-form video via TikTok – accessed by 56% of 18–24s, according to our Digital News Report survey, with around half of these now accessing news on the platform."

However, most media consumers assert that traditional media outlets are more reliable than internet ones due to the spread of false information. Based on the above premise, and arising from the constitutionally guaranteed right of every Nigerian to own, establish, and operate any medium for the dissemination of information, ideas, and opinions (Nigerian Constitution, 1999), much was expected from the media in terms of news curating and salience to help consumers make informed decisions about voting choices which ultimately impacted the results of the election.

Most media firms in colonial Nigeria were either owned by or under the control of the government until the country's second decade of independence in 1979. However, as profits declined, government spending on the media fell dramatically, and private interests took over. Okwuchukwu (2022) contends that media ownership is biased in favor of the powerful and wealthy, who are typically aligned with specific political agendas while another study by ACE Electoral Knowledge Network (2023) revealed that this conundrum limits the functionality of the press as a watchdog in Nigerian democracy and also reduces the public's choices of alternative viewpoints. This will explain the reasons behind and the methods by which issues are presented in a way that reflects specific biases for often predetermined results.

Tracing the background of media ownership in Nigeria, Ajilore et al. (2012) claimed that:

...media ownership in Nigeria started with the government having a monopoly on the electronic media, i.e., radio and television, while private entrepreneurs dominated the print media. Though ownership was different among these media, the goals seemed similar – the protection of the interests of the owners. Iwe Irohin, edited by Reverend Henry Townsend pioneered newspaper publication in 1859. Anglo-African joined it in 1863 with the objective "to promote the interest and welfare of Lagos and its people.

Then came *The Wasp, Lagos Critic, and The Lagos Observer*. Okonkwo (1989: 156) observed that “these newspapers ... their names left no one in doubt about their self-assigned duties.” In 1951, the Federal Government established the Nigerian Broadcasting Service with its headquarters in Lagos and regional transmitting stations in Ibadan, Enugu, and Kaduna. In response to its limited access to the Federal Government-owned NBC, the Action Group government in 1959 established its radio and television stations in Ibadan. Similar actions quickly followed this in the Eastern and Northern regions. Not wanting to be left out of the game, the Federal Government established the NBC-TV, the television arm of the Nigerian Broadcasting Service. The government pioneered the establishment of broadcasting in Nigeria. Due to what was considered the strategic nature of radio and

television, the Federal Government of Nigeria and the various state components maintained exclusive ownership and control over broadcasting (Ajilore et al., 2012).

The table below shows a list of selected leading Nigerian newspapers and television stations to buttress the above assertion. Of these media houses, politicians or wealthy elites with varying degrees of political affiliation or leanings own at least 44%; 47% are privately owned, which means they also pander to the bias of their owners, and the rest are government-owned (Adeyemo, 2022). This implies that they also echo the voices of the government of the day, either at the federal or sub-national levels.

Table 2: Selected newspapers and television stations in Nigeria

<u>SELECTED MEDIA HOUSES</u>	<u>P.O</u>	<u>G.O</u>	<u>PPA</u>
The Punch	PO		
Guardian	PO		
Vanguard	PO		
Channels TV	PO		
Daily Independent			PPA
Daily Trust	PO		
AIT			PPA
LTV		GO	
TVC			PPA

Wazobia	PO		
Lagos Talks	PO		
<i>ThisDay</i>			PPA
The Nation			PPA
NTA Network		GO	
The Sun			PPA
Tribune			PPA
Telegraph			PPA
NN24	PO		
Arise News			PPA
Leadership			PPA
BusinessDay	PO		
Silverbird			PPA
Liberty TV	PO		
National Mirror			PPA

Note: The table categorizes media houses based on their ownership status: Privately Owned (PO), Government Owned (GO), and Privately Owned but Affiliated (PPA). Source: Ikelegbe (2006)

The ownership of media organizations in Nigeria is still predominantly held by the federal and state governments. Presently, six commercial operators oversee 44 networked broadcast stations, with African Independent Television (A.I.T.) managing around 26 of

these stations. According to Ekwelie's (1979) documentation of Nigeria's media history, media presence predated colonial rule and withstood various challenges:

In 1863, the only newspaper in existence was the Iwe Irohin, established in 1859 by the Presbyterian mission. It was bilingual in English and Yoruba, focusing primarily on religious matters. By the 1880s, the publishing monopoly held by this newspaper was broken by several competitors including The Lagos Times and Gold Coast Colony Advertiser, The Eagle and Lagos Critic, and The Lagos Observer. Originally managed by Sierra Leonean immigrants and relatively apolitical, these publications garnered minimal attention. The advent of The Lagos Weekly Record in 1891 altered the dynamic between the colonial authorities and the Nigerian press.”

The guiding principle of "publish or be damned" has been deeply rooted in Nigerian newspapers, tracing back to the colonial period when influential figures such as Nnamdi Azikiwe, Ernest Ikoli, Obafemi Awolowo, and Lateef Jakande utilized their publications to champion independence. Predominantly government-owned until the 1990s, private newspapers like the Daily Trust, Nigerian Tribune, The Punch, Vanguard, and the Guardian persevered in their independent endeavors, despite governmental efforts at suppression (Bourne, 2018).

Regardless of ownership type, the owner's interest plays a crucial role in guiding how media managers fulfill their responsibilities. Managers are mindful that acting against the owner's interest is not acceptable. Therefore, journalists are tasked with navigating the delicate balance between the media owner's and the public's interests, all while upholding legal standards and professional ethics (Apuke, 2016, p. 12).

The media has played a significant role in Nigerian politics since the nation's independence. It supported nationalist movements during the civil war, stood against military dictatorship until democracy was restored in 1999, and endured hardships during periods of conflict. The media faced censorship, harassment, and violence from the military, making it a key player in shaping the country's leadership. According to Iyengar and Kinder (1987), the media influences the public agenda through a cognitive process known as "accessibility," whereby topics covered more frequently and prominently by the news media become more salient in the audience's perception.

CHAPTER III - LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Theoretical Framework: Framing Theory

Media framing serves as a pivotal instrument in shaping public perception, especially in the realm of political campaigns and elections. The manner in which media entities frame candidates, issues, and occurrences holds considerable sway over the opinions and choices of voters. This chapter delves into the correlation between media framing and public perception within the sphere of political campaigns and elections, analyzing the effects of various framing strategies on voter behavior and electoral results.

Significant inquiries in communication studies explore the relationship between media framing and its influence on public perception, particularly its impact on democratic processes and public discourse. McCombs and Shaw (1972) illustrate how the emphasis placed by the media can sway the public's view on the importance and characteristics of an issue, while Iyengar and Kinder (1987) elucidate how media content shapes the criteria used by audiences to assess political figures and issues. Valentino, Hutchings, and Williams (2004) also argue that media framing can mold individuals' knowledge, beliefs, emotions, and actions concerning political matters, with varying media systems potentially affecting framing and public perception in diverse democratic environments (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Therefore, analyzing how the media framed election-related content during the Nigerian General Elections of 2023 is essential for advancing the understanding of this topic.

Media framing theory, first conceptualized by Goffman (1974) and later expanded by Entman (1993), posits that the way the media presents information influences how audiences interpret and comprehend it. Frames structure narratives by emphasizing certain elements of

reality while disregarding others, thus shaping the audience's viewpoint. Entman (1993) outlines four key functions of framing: defining issues, identifying causes, making ethical judgments, and proposing solutions. These functions play a pivotal role in shaping how information is received and comprehended by the public. Framing impacts public perception and discourse by concentrating on specific facets of an issue and portraying them in a particular manner.

Further elaboration on Entman's conceptualizations of these four functions is imperative. Firstly, framing serves to delineate issues by identifying their nature and significance. By emphasizing specific facets of a situation or problem, media frames influence public interpretation of what constitutes an issue and its importance. For example, in the realm of political campaigns, media framing may portray economic instability as a paramount concern, thereby guiding voters to prioritize economic matters in candidate selection (Entman, 1993). This framing function plays a pivotal role by setting the agenda for public discourse and deciding which topics are deemed vital (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

Secondly, framing involves the evaluation of causation, attributing responsibility for the identified issues. This facet of framing ascribes fault or merit to individuals, groups, or broader systemic elements. For instance, in coverage of elections, the media might assign blame for economic challenges to the policies of the incumbent administration, shaping public perceptions of the current government's efficacy (Iyengar, 1991). Analyzing causes is crucial in molding public views on accountability and competence, which can significantly influence voter actions and attitudes toward political figures (Entman, 1993).

Thirdly, framing encompasses the rendering of moral assessments, involving the appraisal of identified issues and their roots from a moral and ethical standpoint. This process entails evaluating the behaviors and intentions of those who are accountable for the problems, often accentuating notions of right and wrong. For example, framing a political scandal in terms of ethical transgressions rather than legal violations can sway public opinion to a more critical view of the implicated parties (Gamson, 1992). Moral judgments within framing have the capacity to evoke emotional reactions and incite public backing or opposition to policies and candidates, rendering this a potent instrument in sculpting public sentiment (Gross & D'Ambrosio, 2004).

Fourthly, it puts forward solutions to the identified problems, thus suggesting remedies. This strategic framing aspect draws public attention towards particular actions and policy recommendations, effectively steering discussions on what should be prioritized. For instance, focusing on systemic overhaul rather than individual culpability when addressing healthcare issues can generate public endorsement for extensive policy reforms (Iyengar, 1991). Through offering remedies, media frames steer public expectations and preferences regarding governmental and institutional responses to societal challenges (Entman, 1993).

These roles are pivotal in molding public perceptions and discussions by spotlighting specific facets of issues and guiding interpretations. Grasping these functions offers valuable insights into the influence of media framing on public opinion and political conduct, increasing awareness of its notable impact on public conversations. To investigate the impact of the media on the selection, emphasis, and interpretation of news stories regarding elections, scholars have utilized theoretical frameworks like agenda setting, framing theory,

and media effects models (Entman, 1993). Put simply, agenda-setting theory, introduced by McCombs and Shaw (1972), asserts that although the media does not dictate what individuals should think, it significantly shapes their thoughts by prioritizing specific issues. This theory implies a substantial relationship between the attention given to certain issues by the media and the significance perceived by the audience. In their influential study on the 1968 presidential campaign, McCombs and Shaw discovered a close alignment between the topics emphasized in the news media and those deemed most crucial by voters for the nation. Particularly powerful in political contexts, the media's agenda-setting role can impact electoral results and policy priorities by influencing issue prominence. Through consistent coverage of particular subjects, McCombs and Reynolds (2002) noted that the media can bring these issues to the forefront of public attention, thereby sparking political engagement and civic discussion.

3.2 Priming in Media and Political Campaigns

Priming, closely linked to agenda-setting, is the media's capacity to influence the standards used by the public to assess political figures and matters (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). This phenomenon occurs when the media highlights specific issues, rendering them more memorable to the audience. This enhanced accessibility means these issues are more likely to be considered when evaluating political leaders and making choices. For example, if the media extensively covers terrorism, the public is inclined to evaluate political candidates based on their perceived ability to handle terrorism-related concerns. Priming can, therefore, sway individuals' focus towards particular issues when developing opinions about political candidates and policies (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). By establishing the benchmarks for

evaluation, priming shapes what individuals contemplate and the criteria they use to make assessments.

In political campaigns, media framing can take various forms, including:

i. **Issue Framing:** Emphasizing specific political issues to influence voter priorities, perceptions, and electoral decisions. This technique directs public attention towards particular topics, impacting the significance voters attribute to these issues during elections (Chong & Druckman, 2007). The media's choice of issues to highlight and how they are presented can significantly influence the political agenda and voter behavior. Studies have indicated that issue framing plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion and influencing voter behavior. For instance, research by Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley (1997) illustrated that framing the topic of racial equality in terms of fairness versus law and order resulted in varied levels of support for related policies. Similarly, findings by Druckman (2004) demonstrated how framing a policy issue differently could sway public opinion on the policy. In regards to political campaigns, Chong and Druckman (2007) demonstrated that the framing of issues can impact how voters prioritize different concerns, thereby influencing their voting behavior. By spotlighting specific topics, campaigns can harmonize voter priorities with the candidate's agenda, enhancing their prospects of electoral success. An illustrative example is the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election, where Donald Trump's campaign adeptly framed immigration as a pivotal issue, underscoring the necessity for reinforced borders and national security. As per Patterson (2016), this framing resonated with a significant segment of the electorate apprehensive about immigration and its perceived effects on employment and safety, bolstering Trump's support base.

ii. **Attribute Framing:** Emphasizing distinct traits or attributes of political candidates. This method focuses on highlighting specific qualities or characteristics of political candidates to shape public perception. Such framing accentuates candidates' personal attributes, experiences, competencies, or vulnerabilities, influencing how voters assess them (Druckman, 2004). By portraying certain attributes positively or negatively, the media can influence voter viewpoints and shape the overall perception of a candidate. Attribute framing is grounded in the overarching framework of media framing theory, which examines how information presentation impacts audience interpretation (Entman, 1993). In this context, attribute framing delves into the traits and characteristics of political figures, guiding voters' evaluations and decisions. Druckman further asserts that framing effects arise as individuals lean on prominent frames as heuristics or shortcuts for intricate evaluations.

An exemplification of this was in Nigeria ahead of the 2015 presidential elections when the media framed then candidate Muhammadu Buhari as someone of high moral standing who would be tough on corruption. This integrity frame appealed to voters who had concerns about governance and corruption, and it promotes particular narratives capable of influencing voters' perceptions based on selective candidate attributes. Media coverage frequently highlighted these attributes, juxtaposing them against John McCain's experience and steadfastness. This framing aided Obama in connecting with voters in search of a transformative leader (Druckman, 2004).

iii. **Conflict Framing:** This framing centers on highlighting conflicts and disagreements among candidates. The key focus is on the media's accentuation of conflicts, disagreements, and rivalries between political candidates. This particular framing style illuminates the

combative nature of political campaigns, often depicting elections as a battleground where candidates clash over policies, ideologies, and personal attributes (Aalberg et al., 2012). By spotlighting conflict, the media aims to spark interest and engagement among viewers, thereby molding voter perceptions and behaviors in specific ways.

Conflict framing falls within the scope of media framing theory, which posits that the presentation of information influences how audiences interpret and comprehend it (Entman, 1993). In this context, conflict framing underscores the competitive and contentious elements inherent in political campaigns, portraying them as contests between opposing factions. This framing can be viewed through the "game frame" or "horse-race journalism" perspective, where the media concentrates on who is leading or lagging behind rather than substantive policy matters (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). Patterson (2016) illustrates the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election as a prime example of conflict framing, as the interactions between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton were characterized by pronounced conflict framing. Media coverage predominantly featured personal attacks, scandals, and controversies, painting the campaign as a bitter and fragmented competition. Such framing significantly contributed to the highly polarized and contentious ambiance of the election.

iv. Strategy Framing: Focuses on the strategies and tactics employed in political campaigns rather than delving into policy issues. This concept revolves around the media's attention to the strategic maneuvers and tactics of political campaigns rather than the substantive policy matters at hand. Strategy framing highlights the planning, maneuvering, and competitive elements of campaigns, portraying elections as strategic competitions where victory is prioritized over engaging in debates on policies or ideologies (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997).

By spotlighting campaign strategies, the media constructs a narrative akin to a sporting event or a chess match, depicting candidates as players using various tactics to outwit their competitors.

Research has shown the prevalence and impact of strategy framing in media coverage of political campaigns. As noted by Cappella and Jamieson (*ibid*), strategy framing often takes precedence over substantive policy reporting in political journalism. This focus on strategy has the potential to influence voter perceptions by framing elections as contests rather than platforms for issue-based discussions. An illustrative example of this phenomenon was observed during the 2012 U.S. Presidential Election, where, as highlighted by Farnsworth & Lichter (2011), strategy framing featured prominently in the media coverage of the election between Barack Obama and Mitt Romney.

3.2.i Impact on Voter Perception and Behavior

Media framing and political communication significantly impact voter perceptions and behavior. By directing attention to specific facets of a story or issue, framing plays a crucial role in shaping how voters comprehend and interpret political information, influencing their attitudes, beliefs, and ultimately, their voting patterns.

Entman (1993) identified that framing is the selection of particular parts of an issue and making them more salient, which influences the public's perception. This is a common tactic in political communication to draw attention to issues that support the goals and principles of a political party or candidate. Voters are more likely to view certain political issues—such as healthcare reform or economic concerns—as vital when such features are consistently highlighted in the media, and this perception may influence their voting choices.

Voters are more likely to assess politicians on their economic ideas, for instance, when the media centers an election on economic performance. The media's emphasis on corruption and governance during Nigeria's 2015 presidential election, for example, helped to shape the narrative around accountability and greatly affected voters' choice of Muhammadu Buhari, whose campaign vowed to combat corruption (Alawode & Adesanya, 2016). Voter perception is greatly influenced by how political problems are framed in the media, particularly during election seasons. Media framing plays a critical role in influencing voting behavior by stressing specific political concerns, placing blame, evoking strong emotions, and showcasing specific values. By focusing attention on particular aspects of a story, the framing process helps voters understand and evaluate political information and influences their choice of candidates. This process involves defining issues, assigning responsibility, emphasizing particular values, and eliciting emotional responses:

a. **Crafting Candidate Image:** The portrayal of political candidates by the media plays a pivotal role in shaping how they are perceived by the public. Positive portrayals can bolster a candidate's attractiveness, whereas negative depictions can tarnish their reputation. For instance, the portrayal of Barack Obama as a charismatic and inspiring figure during the 2008 U.S. presidential election significantly contributed to enhancing his positive public image (Druckman, 2004). Conversely, highlighting a candidate's mistakes or controversies through negative portrayals can diminish public trust and support.

b. **Shaping Issue Relevance:** The media's coverage of specific issues can accentuate their significance in the public sphere. During electoral campaigns, how the media frames critical themes like the economy, healthcare, or immigration can sway voter preferences and choices. For example, Olukotun (2002) argued that the manner the media framed Nigeria's economic

challenges usually makes for election soundbites by shaping how the public react to these issues. This pattern is also discernible in other African countries like Kenya where, Nyabuga (2010) found that the Kenyan media's focus on corruption triggered the public's interest and ultimately influenced their voting decisions. This framing of political issues, he noted, significantly influenced voter behavior by prioritizing certain narratives over others.

c. Fostering and Perpetuating Preconceptions: Media portrayals can sow and perpetuate stereotypes about candidates based on factors like gender, race, or other attributes. Notably, female candidates often encounter distinct portrayals compared to their male counterparts, with the media often spotlighting their appearance and personal lives (Kahn, 1994). Such portrayals can impact how their competence and electability are perceived by the public.

3.2.ii Case Studies from USA, South Africa and Kenya's Presidential Elections

Druckman (2014) argues that the 2008 U.S. presidential election serves as a prominent illustration of how media portrayals influence public opinion. Barack Obama's campaign centered on themes of hope and change, positioning him as a transformative figure. In contrast, John McCain was often depicted in terms of his experience and steadiness. These portrayals molded voter perceptions and played a significant role in determining the election's outcome.

The South African presidency of Jacob Zuma was another instance of how public opinion was shaped by media representations. When describing Zuma, the media frequently emphasized his captivating demeanor and affinity for the working class, portraying him as a "man of the people." But as his administration wore on, media narratives changed to highlight his role in corruption scandals. Here, Druckman's theory of framing is

demonstrated by the way the media shaped public opinion of Zuma, initially helping him win an election and then fueling a generalized sense of disenchantment with his leadership (Wasserman, 2010).

Finally, media coverage of William Ruto and Uhuru Kenyatta in Kenya prior to the 2013 elections highlighted their leadership in the face of controversy, especially in relation to their cases at the International Criminal Court (ICC). The candidates' presentation as tough, tenacious leaders opposing foreign forces attempting to erode Kenyan sovereignty was crucial in winning over the public's sympathy and support. Researchers like Nyabuga and Booker (2013) observed that this narrative appealed to nationalist feelings in the electorate, swaying public opinion in their favor in spite of the ICC accusations.

3.2.iii Media Framing and Public Perception in the Digital Era

With the emergence of digital media, the realm of media framing and public perception in political contexts has undergone a significant shift. Platforms such as social media, blogs, and online news sources now present a multitude of diverse and sometimes disjointed perspectives on candidates and issues. Research conducted by Merrill and Papacharissi (2013) highlights that social media enables the creation of user-generated frames that have the potential to challenge the conventional narratives put forth by traditional media which, in turn, fosters a more engaging and fluid environment for framing. Through the participation of diverse voices in the debate, social media democratizes the framing of political issues, in contrast to traditional media where a small number of people control the conversation. This user-generated framing promotes diversity of viewpoints, which improves the fluidity and interest of public discourse. For instance, during the *Arab Spring*, people were able to use social media sites like Facebook and Twitter to articulate

their struggles in a way that was widely understood, frequently refuting the narratives propagated by the state-run media. Research from Howard and Hussain (2011) lends even more credence to this, and demonstrates how social media aided in redefining political demonstrations in the Middle East into democratization movements that attracted attention from across the globe.

Similar to this, research conducted by Bosch (2017) shows how youth activists in South Africa's #FeesMustFall campaign were emboldened by social media to challenge conventional media representations of student protests. By redefining the story from one of lawlessness to a valid call for educational change, these activists were able to reach a larger audience and get support for their cause via the use of social media sites like Twitter. In today's media landscape, where platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram allow people to circumvent traditional information gatekeepers, challenging the dominance of elite narratives and enabling more pluralistic and participatory framing of political and social issues, this idea of user-generated frames is crucial.

3.2.iv The Role of Social Media

Platforms like Twitter and Facebook play a pivotal role in shaping political discourse and perceptions of candidates. Political figures and their supporters leverage these platforms to promote favorable narratives and counter unfavorable ones. Studies have demonstrated that social media has the power to magnify both positive and negative frames, thereby impacting public perception and influencing voter behavior (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013).

In contrast to traditional media, social media platforms provide a decentralized and interactive arena where users can actively participate in real-time discussions, express their

opinions, and construct frames. Social media sites like Facebook, TikTok and Twitter have taken center stage in determining how the public views politicians and how political discourse is shaped. These platforms are used by political individuals, parties, and their followers to create and spread stories that balance out unfavorable representations with positive ones. Research has indicated that political framing on social media is magnified, influencing public perception and voting behavior significantly. This phenomenon affects both positive and negative content.

Using social media, politicians and their allies may interact with voters directly and get around the gatekeepers of traditional media. They influence how the public views their capacity for leadership, their top policy concerns, and their character traits by creating and disseminating positive narratives. Political actors can showcase well-curated personas on social media that highlight their positive traits and downplay their flaws. Studies have demonstrated, for instance, that candidates can create narratives that highlight their leadership prowess and political accomplishments, which frequently shapes how undecided voters perceive them.

The decentralized and interactive features of social media sites like Facebook and Twitter have a subtle role in influencing public opinion. According to Enli (2017), for example, social media campaigns give politicians the ability to steer the narrative surrounding their campaigns while also facilitating user-generated content that either confirms or refutes these narratives. Official campaign statements and unplanned public responses can be found in equal measure on social media, in contrast to traditional media where coverage is shaped by editorial choices. This dynamic makes some frames stand out

more than others, which promotes engagement but also makes unfavorable frames more noticeable, which could harm a candidate's reputation.

3.2.v Enhanced Amplification and Diversification of Frames

Social media plays a big role in shaping how we see things. It lets lots of people—like politicians, activists, journalists, and everyday folks—share their views. This is different from traditional media, where a small group decides what gets shared (Merrill & Papacharissi, 2013). For example, during campaigns, political candidates use social media to spread their messages, while their opponents share different viewpoints.

Social media allows messages to go viral quickly to reach a wider audience than traditional media would. Instead of relying on TV or newspapers, candidates can talk directly to voters on platforms like Facebook and Twitter. Studies by Enli and Skogerbo (2013) show that politicians use these sites to push their stories and criticize their rivals. This makes certain ideas more visible to everyone.

Unlike traditional media, which can limit opinions, social media brings in many voices. It allows for different viewpoints to be heard. Political candidates and their supporters can share positive messages, and critics can present their side too, leading to richer discussions.

Movements like #BlackLivesMatter and #EndSARS in Nigeria show how social media empowers people to tell their stories and activists used these platforms to highlight issues of social justice that mainstream media might ignore (Olorunnisola & Martin, 2019). Social media gives a chance for voices that usually don't get heard to share their viewpoints.

Overall, social media has changed how citizens talk about politics. It encourages more people to join the conversation. Political figures can connect with the public directly, making sure various opinions are recognized and shared.

3.2.vi Enhanced Personalization and Emotional Engagement:

Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram not only facilitate personalization but also elevate emotional engagement in political framing. Users can directly follow and engage with political personalities and influencers on these platforms, cultivating a sense of personal connection (Lee & Shin, 2012). This direct interaction often fuels more emotionally intense perspectives as users openly express their reactions and sentiments toward political occurrences and individuals.

Politicians frequently use informal language, behind-the-scenes photos, and personal anecdotes to market themselves on social media sites like Instagram and Twitter. This increases the perceived accessibility of political personalities by creating a feeling of personal connection between them and their supporters (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013). Users' emotional engagement in politics is increased because of the individualized character of these contacts, which gives them a sense of direct involvement in the political process. For instance, former US President Barack Obama skillfully used Facebook and Twitter to build rapport with voters, humanizing his brand through the sharing of intimate moments and campaign tales (Enli, 2017).

Similarly, social media personalization has greatly influenced electoral campaigns in African cultures. Both Muhammadu Buhari and Goodluck Jonathan utilized Twitter to structure their campaigns in ways that spoke to voters' emotional and personal concerns

during the 2015 Nigerian presidential election, including economic hardship, security, and national unity (Ezeh & Mboso, 2018). A sense of personal connection in the political narratives being disseminated was created by this emotional engagement, which in turn affected voter behavior.

Political communication has changed in the digital age due to the customization and emotional connection that social media platforms provide. These platforms increase the influence of political framing by enabling direct and individualized interactions between users and political actors. This increases users' emotional participation. Social media's capacity to strengthen emotional responses and create personal relationships will continue to be important in influencing political attitudes and behaviors as long as it plays a significant part in political debate.

3.2.vii Impactful Virality and Agenda-Setting

The inherent virality of content on social media significantly influences agenda-setting and framing. As particular frames gain momentum on social media, they swiftly infiltrate the mainstream media narrative. This phenomenon, known as the "social media agenda-setting" effect, demonstrates how the topics and frames dominating social media dialogues shape traditional media coverage and public perceptions (McCombs, 2014). For example, trending hashtags and topics can spotlight specific issues or events during electoral periods, compelling traditional media outlets to cover them and reinforcing their significance in the public domain. The structure of social media promotes content to spread quickly, which in turn affects how political discourse is framed. Viral material influences public perception and encourages interaction since it is frequently dramatic or emotionally charged.

Traditional media is under pressure to adopt similar framing when particular frames dominate social media discussions, or else it risks becoming irrelevant. This occurrence demonstrates how social media affects both the topics and the methods of coverage. As an illustration, the #BlackLivesMatter movement first became well-known on Twitter before gaining traction in American national media coverage (Freelon, McIlwain, & Clark, 2016). This transition from social media to mainstream media illustrates how viral content on social media shaped mainstream narratives about race, police brutality, and justice.

The viral nature of social media has a big impact on political framing and agenda-setting. Because content is shared so quickly, some frames and narratives can find their way into traditional media, which then amplifies them for a wider audience to consume. Public perceptions are significantly shaped by this dynamic interplay between social and traditional media, particularly during high-stakes events like elections or social movements.

3.2.viii Citizen Journalism and Authenticity

Social media's emergence has boosted citizen journalism, empowering everyday users to report and frame political incidents through their unique viewpoints. This form of journalism offers genuine grassroots perspectives that sometimes contradict mainstream media narratives (Carlson, 2007). Citizen journalists can shed light on overlooked matters, introducing alternative frames and amplifying underrepresented voices. This democratization of framing can enrich public discussions, albeit it also raises concerns regarding information accuracy and dependability.

More genuine, localized perspectives on events may be provided by citizen journalists, particularly in areas or situations that the mainstream media might ignore. This can be especially important in times of crisis, social movements, or elections. For example,

citizen journalists were instrumental in organizing protests and exposing governmental brutality during the Arab Spring, providing firsthand accounts that frequently differed from the official narratives presented by state-run media (Howard & Hussain, 2013).

A wider spectrum of voices can now influence public discourse thanks to the democratization of the framing process brought forth by social citizen journalism. The monopoly that traditional media has enjoyed over the framing of political and social issues is challenged by the capacity of regular people to post their information. This broadens the scope of political debate and enhances public conversations by bringing a wider range of opinions and topics to the forefront (Gillmor, 2006).

However, there are limitations to the democratization of framing, mainly in terms of information veracity and dependability. There may be concerns regarding the possible propagation of false information and the amplification of biased or unreliable content as citizen journalists do not have the same professional standards and editorial oversight as traditional journalists (Carlson, 2007). This problem is especially noticeable during political upheavals or elections, when it can be difficult to distinguish between activity and reporting, potentially distorting public opinion.

Social citizen journalism has undeniably changed the media landscape by giving regular people the ability to voice their opinions on political and social topics. Although this has made the media landscape more diverse and welcoming, it also begs concerns about veracity and authenticity. Finding a balance between the requirement for factual accuracy and authenticity is a major problem for citizen journalists and the larger media ecosystem as this movement continues to gain traction.

3.2.ix The Impact of Fake News and Misinformation

The proliferation of diverse framing perspectives has the potential to enhance the inclusivity of public discourse. However, this phenomenon also introduces concerns regarding the veracity and dependability of information disseminated. The contemporary digital landscape has fostered the dissemination of fake news and misinformation, contributing to the distortion of media framing and public perceptions. Instances of false narratives surrounding candidates and issues can significantly sway voter sentiments and influence electoral results. The 2016 U.S. presidential election underscored the influence of fake news in sculpting public opinion, as inaccurate reports regarding candidates permeated various social media platforms (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017).

In Africa, there are similar incidents of fake news and outright misinformation during elections. For instance, during Nigeria's 2019 general elections, false information regarding candidates and electoral fraud was widely disseminated on social media sites like Facebook and Twitter. Numerous of these tales were created with the intention of stoking prejudices based on race or religion, further dividing an already split public. According to a study by Ibrahim et al. (2020), which examined how voter views were impacted by disinformation in Nigeria, these lies had a significant influence on political discourse and, eventually, electoral outcomes. Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) contend that disinformation can intensify socioeconomic and ethnic conflicts in Africa, fostering mistrust of the election process. This is similar to what happened during the 2017 Kenyan elections, when a lot of false information and fake news spread, affecting voter behavior and raising questions about the elections' legitimacy (Nyabola, 2018).

Consequently, disinformation skews the media's framing process in addition to

distorting the facts. Fake news articles frequently present or highlight particular facets of a problem, giving it a deceptive context. For instance, during the 2016 U.S. election, false reports on electoral fraud and illegal voting helped to frame the election so that many people saw it as unfair and corrupt, which shaped the public's perception of the democratic process (Guess, Nagler, & Tucker, 2019). Voters' perceptions and trust in democratic institutions are impacted by this type of framing.

If left unchecked, the spread of fake news and misinformation presents a clear and present danger to the democratic process and the integrity of political debates. False narratives have the power to dangerously affect voter sentiments and mislead the public by distorting media framing. For this reason, it is crucial to verify the accuracy of information obtained through the media.

Furthermore, the ownership of media outlets plays a pivotal role in shaping election-related narratives and steering public opinion and political conduct (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Through a meticulous examination of scholarly works centered around Nigeria's pivotal February 2023 presidential elections, this review aims to consolidate key insights. This electoral juncture marked a crucial phase in the nation's democratic expedition and sheds light on how media consumers might be swayed within the discourse surrounding the electoral process.

This study examines the impact of media framing on the perceptions of the electorate during the 2023 presidential elections, employing the lens of framing theory. Scholars such as Entman have elaborated on Goffman's (1974) seminal literature to refine framing theory, offering a comprehensive framework to comprehend how intentional framing strategies

influence the presentation and interpretation of election-centric data. By scrutinizing how political narratives were framed, this paradigm elucidates the role of these constructions in shaping public sentiment and democratic deliberations in Nigeria.

3.3 Why is Framing so important?

Entman (1993) provided a definition of *media framing* as the intentional selection and emphasis of specific aspects of a news story or topic while minimizing or disregarding others. Hallahan (1999, p.207) suggests that through news framing, journalists can present a story within a confined space and provide a broader context for an event. Auerbach and Bloch-Elkon (2005) argue that framing is particularly influential when the audience relies on the media for information and decision-making, especially in cases where issues are unfamiliar. Various studies on framing effects have been conducted by researchers like Entman (1993), Scheufele & Tewksbury (2007), and McQuail (1994) among others. These studies consistently highlight the importance of purposeful framing and structuring for readers to comprehend the underlying message of news stories.

For instance, Okoro and Odoemelam (2013) explored the framing of information on the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria within newspapers to offer deeper insights. Their study revealed significant differences in reporting and framing of the crisis by newspapers, including variations in the predominant frames utilized. Azlan (2012) emphasized how media framing influences public perceptions of subjects, citing the significance of issue accessibility and the alignment of frames with the audience's existing viewpoints. He also pointed out the interdependence between framing effects and the public's knowledge and attitudes towards a subject (p. 320).

Moreover, framing not only encompasses the essence and manner of presentation but also shapes how audiences perceive and assess the information being conveyed. Entman argues that framing plays a crucial role in determining how a problem is characterized and presented, achieved through the establishment of a cognitive structure that influences how news and events are interpreted by viewers. His theory on framing suggests that the media exerts a significant influence on public discourse and the significance assigned to various issues within society. The portrayal of individuals, political groups, and key topics by the media can impact voter behavior and influence the outcomes of elections. A phenomenon known as the "*framing effect*," where individuals select between options based on the positive or negative connotations in which they are presented, can be induced through deliberate and consistent repetition of a specific set of news items (Plous, 1993). The landmark research by Tversky and Kahneman (1981) illustrated how subtle alterations in wordings can lead to substantial differences in decision-making when faced with a choice. Presenting options in terms of potential gains tends to encourage risk aversion, while framing them in terms of potential losses tends to promote risk-taking behavior. This pivotal study laid the groundwork for understanding how the framing of information can influence decision-making processes.

As per the theory, media organizations wield considerable influence over public sentiment by emphasizing certain facets of an issue while minimizing others. Frames serve as mental models that shape how individuals process information and aid in their comprehension of ongoing events. Consequently, framing theory provides a structured approach to examining the impact of media ownership on the selection, emphasis, and delivery of election-related information during Nigeria's upcoming general elections in 2023.

3.4 Effects of Ownership on Issue Framing

Media ownership significantly shapes the presentation of election-related issues. Media institutions, primarily owned by influential politicians or major corporations, prioritize the interests of the owning class based on the "propaganda model" elucidated by Chomsky and Herman (1988). This model offers a framework for examining how media ownership structures could impact the framing of issues related to elections and propagate narratives that serve the owners' goals.

The propaganda model draws attention to the way media organizations give precedence to material that aligns with the beliefs and objectives of its owners—be they powerful political figures or big businesses. This translates into selective issue framing in the electoral context, when certain political issues are either downplayed or emphasized in order to support the politicians or policies that the owners support. According to the model, media outlets serve as "filters" for information, and factors like ownership, advertising, and the need to keep good ties with influential stakeholders all have an impact on how stories are framed (Chomsky & Herman, 1988).

Political elites hold substantial shares of privately owned media companies in African nations, where ownership influence is particularly pronounced. For example, Tettey (2001) looked at how the political elite-owned media in Ghana presented electoral problems to benefit their political friends. In these kinds of environments, the ownership structure frequently leads to biased reporting, with political narratives shaped to uphold the status quo or bolster the political power of the owning elite.

In Nigeria, media ownership is closely linked to both political and economic agenda. Ojebode (2011) examined the impact of ownership on the framing of issues in Nigerian newspapers during elections and discovered that media outlets controlled by political figures or those who support them frequently present topics like security, economic change, and corruption in a way that either elevates the shortcomings of rival candidates or shields their favorite candidates from criticism. This type of framing influences voters' perception on particular aspects of a candidate's personality or policy, which has a substantial impact on public opinion.

For instance, during Nigeria's 2015 elections, some media outlets heavily highlighted the then-incumbent government's security shortcomings (particularly in relation to the Boko Haram insurgency), while others gave greater weight to economic measures. The political inclinations of the media owners were reflected in these editorial choices, which shaped voters' perceptions of the issues and affected election results (Ojebode, 2011).

A similar trend was evident during Kenya's 2013 general elections with political elites controlling the media and shaping coverage in ways that strengthened pre-existing power structures. Nyabuga and Booker (2013) claim that elite class interests were frequently mirrored in Kenyan media coverage of elections, which downplayed opposition narratives and framed issues in a way that favored the ruling political coalition. This deliberate framing has a significant effect on how the general public views political politicians and their policies. According to Agbese (2023), media organizations that support various political parties have a tendency to present topics like corruption, insecurity, and economic reform in diverse ways based on the interests of their owners. In a similar line, Umaru and Gambo (2023) looked at how security issues were covered during Nigeria's general elections of

2023 and they discovered that media outlets controlled by powerful political figures gave priority to certain subjects, like the insecurity in the north, in order to further the political goals of their owners, while other important subjects, like healthcare and education, received less attention. Finally, Nwafor (2023) investigated how the leading political candidates for the 2023 elections were portrayed by privately owned media. According to his research, media outlets had a significant role in presenting their owners' chosen candidates in a favorable light and painting the opposition in an unfavorable light.

3.5 Candidate Framing

Globally, ownership of the media has increasingly consolidated into the hands of a few corporations, as highlighted in *The New Media Monopoly* (Bagdikian, 1983). This trend allows media owners to shape the framing of critical political issues such as corruption, economic policy, and security concerns during election periods. The influence of media ownership on the portrayal of political matters is as significant in Nigeria as in the United States of America. Examining how these issues were presented during Nigeria's 2023 general elections will shed light on the impact of media ownership on the interpretation and presentation of pivotal political topics.

Entman (2012) posits that media framing can sway public perceptions of political candidates by spotlighting specific attributes or issues while diminishing others. Consequently, political control over media platforms provides electoral candidates with a distinct advantage. In Nigeria, politicians' affiliations can sway how media outlets depict political candidates, given the close ties or ownership stake many politicians have in these outlets.

Research by Iyengar and Kinder (1987) supports the claim that media framing significantly influences public opinions about political candidates. They argue that topics receiving extensive coverage become more salient to viewers, while those receiving less exposure lose significance. Furthermore, issues with substantial coverage continue to play a crucial role in the evaluation and selection of candidates for public office. Notably, during the 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria, there was a resemblance in how selected media houses reported on the alleged drug case involving Bola Tinubu of the APC in the United States of America compared to the allegations of fraud against Atiku Abubakar while serving as vice president from 1999 to 2007 (U.S. Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, 2010; McKinley, 2009). Exploring candidate portrayal in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria through the perspective of media ownership sheds light on how political affiliations influence the representation of candidates in the media.

3.6 Economic Dependencies and Frame selection

The financial reliance of media outlets on their proprietors also plays a role in framing decisions. McChesney (1999) contends that economic constraints can lead media organizations to tailor their frames in accordance with the interests of their owners or funders. The issues emphasized and highlighted in the context of Nigeria's 2023 general elections may be influenced by economic dependencies as media outlets seek to maintain financial backing from sponsors or owners. Examining how financial dependency molds news framing regarding elections can elucidate the complex relationship between media ownership and frame selection in Nigerian media.

3.7 Media Pluralism as a Counterbalance

Hallin and Mancini (2004) proposed that a diversity of media entities can serve as a check against potential conflicts or bias by allowing for various viewpoints and frameworks, thus fostering a more profound comprehension of current events. Evaluating the degree of media pluralism in Nigeria during the 2023 general elections will help clarify potential reactions to biased framing.

Essentially, this theoretical framework, centered on framing, paves the way for an in-depth exploration of how media framing influenced public perceptions leading up to the 2023 Nigerian presidential elections. This study utilizes the theoretical insights of Goffman (1974), Entman (1993), and other academics to dissect the factors that shaped election-related information, significantly impacting the election results. Ultimately, this will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how the media molds public opinion and democratic discourse.

3.8 Media Framing Strategies

All media channels utilize various framing strategies to construct news narratives during election periods. This involves selecting, highlighting, and presenting specific elements of news stories with suitable framing techniques. Understanding the concept of framing is crucial in exploring its techniques. Framing mainly involves the processes of selection and salience. As described by Entman (1993), framing entails highlighting certain aspects of a perceived reality to emphasize a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral assessment, and treatment recommendation in a communicative context. Entman (*ibid*) illustrated framing using the example of the "Cold War," which heavily

influenced U.S. foreign affairs news during that era. This frame accentuated specific foreign events and civil wars as issues, pinpointed their origin (communist rebels), offered moral judgments (atheistic aggression), and proposed specific solutions (U.S. support for the opposing side).

Pan and Kosicki (2001) recognize that framing analysis contributes to a better understanding of social protests, transformations, and controls. They outlined three primary objectives of framing analysis. Firstly, it helps identify and delineate the dominant frame in a social controversy, including specific aspects within that frame and alternative frames advocated by challenger groups. Secondly, framing analysis assesses the diversity of approaches and techniques that influence how a topic is framed in society. The third objective involves evaluating the extent to which newspaper articles, television news broadcasts, and other media forms are consumed to understand how they present discussions and disagreements to the public.

3.9 Theme vs. Episodic Framing

Media often opt for theme framing, which highlights broader issues and context, and episodic framing, which centers on specific events. Rather than following trends, episodic framing typically focuses on disconnected and individual episodes or personal experiences to present information about a subject or event in an individualized or personal perspective (Iyengar, 1991). However, Entman defines thematic framing as incorporating information in a framework that encompasses underlying issues, patterns, or systematic elements connected to an incident to enhance understanding and offer clarity. Pan and Kosicki (2001) leverage these distinct yet interrelated viewpoints to examine the essential aspects of framing in

public discourse. They argue that both forms of framing can aid the media and political actors in influencing public opinion.

3.10 Tone and Emotional Framing

Tonal variations can be a crucial aspect of framing. Panzarrela (2019) discussed the construction of political messages to sway public opinion and subsequent political behaviors. These messages may be perceived as neutral, detrimental, or constructive. Capella and Jamieson (1997) argue that the tone and emotional framing present in media coverage impact public cynicism and trust in the media.

Tone framing denotes how media messages convey a particular emotional tone or perspective regarding an issue, event, or topic (Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000). It involves articulating fear, anger, compassion, or hope through words, visuals, and rhetoric. The tone utilized in media reporting can signify objectivity or bias, as well as the credibility and trustworthiness of the information relayed.

Emotional framing, conversely, delineates how framing influences audience perceptions by evoking emotional reactions and molding attitudes and viewpoints on a subject. It also influences memory retention, decision-making, as emotional information can spur individuals to act decisively or formulate opinions. In media and communication research, tone and emotional framing serve as framing techniques that focus on how the emotional tone of media messages can sway public perceptions and attitudes. According to (Lecheler, Schuck, & de Vreese, 2013), these strategies underscore how news and information impact individuals on an emotional level.

3.11 Visual Framing

Entman (2012) posits that visual elements such as photographs and graphics wield significant influence in conveying framing messages that shape public opinion. Media establishments can sway public views, evoke intense emotions, and craft narratives by selectively choosing and presenting visual components, thus shaping how news and information are framed. Similar to textual framing, ethical considerations guarantee that visual framing accurately reflects the intricacies of subjects and fosters the cultivation of nuanced public opinions.

3.12 Impact of Media Framing on Public Perception

How does media framing sway public opinion, guiding individuals from one viewpoint to another by prioritizing certain narratives and emphasizing particular aspects of a story over others? Media organizations wield a significant influence on how the audience perceives and comprehends events, shaping their attitudes, beliefs, and viewpoints, ultimately influencing their responses and actions through an often-concealed predetermined agenda (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

Sub-Themes:

i. **Assessing Political Candidates:** The way voters perceive candidates and the issues surrounding them plays a crucial role in determining their success in the political realm, making it a pivotal aspect of the electoral process. Iyengar and Kinder (1987) highlight the importance of framing in positioning or repositioning politicians, suggesting that television news can sway public opinion by framing political figures and topics.

ii. **Highlighting Policy Concerns:** Framing commonly steers voters' attention towards specific policy matters, influencing which topics become prominent in the public eye. It reflects the emphasis placed on certain issues within political discussions and media coverage. As media coverage shapes the relevance and urgency of certain concerns within the public discourse, this selective emphasis on particular issues can have a substantial impact on voter perception and behavior (Entman, 1993; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Media framing eventually influences the relevance of issues in the election environment by drawing attention to specific policy problems (Scheufele, 1999).

iii. **Shaping Public Discourse:** Through guiding the focus of public attention, media framing plays a key role in setting the agenda for public discourse. While distinct from framing, agenda-setting is akin to it in that framing pertains to the understanding of specific issues, whereas agenda-setting addresses how the media can influence particular topics and bring them to the forefront of public discourse (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

iv. **Priming:** People's decision-making can be influenced by framing, which can prime them to consider specific factors when evaluating candidates or topics. Zhu and Chen (2015) offer valuable insights into how priming affects public discussions and can be a useful tool for studying priming effects within the context of news framing. An example of how framing can impact how voters may be primed to assess candidates' suitability was seen in the attention garnered by the All Progressives Congress (A.P.C.) when its then-presidential candidate selected Kashim Shettima, who shared the same Islamic faith. Nigeria is divided between predominantly Muslim northern regions and mostly Christian-dominated southern regions, often leading to the presentation of candidates of different religions for the roles of

principal and vice-presidential candidates to maintain religious balance. Although not mandated by the constitution, this traditional arrangement has helped mitigate concerns of religious dominance since Independence. The last deviation from this arrangement occurred in 1993 when M.K.O. Abiola, a Muslim businessman from the South, chose Babagana Kingibe, also a Muslim from the North, as his running mate. Despite facing strong opposition, they emerged victorious in an election that was subsequently annulled by the military (Noble, 1993). Three decades later, the Tinubu/Shettima partnership repeated the feat achieved by Abiola and Kingibe.

Given the sensitive ethno-religious makeup of the country, the situation evolved into a media battle between the party and other political factions aimed at stoking sentiments of religious supremacy. Gbadebo (2022), alongside FORb -- an organization dedicated to upholding the right to freedom of religion or belief -- echoed the sentiments of many dissenting voices on the matter, stating:

The rich religious diversity in Nigeria offers numerous benefits for fostering mutual understanding and unity. Ensuring social cohesion and promoting sustainable development, when managed effectively, poses a risk of unraveling the progress achieved in fostering harmonious coexistence thus far in the nation. The decision of the All Progressives Congress (A.P.C.) to endorse a Muslim-Muslim ticket may jeopardize the existing gains of religious coexistence. If this ticket

prevails, the representation of Christians in the highest political positions within Africa's most populous nation could be significantly diminished or even lost indefinitely.

(FOrB, 2023)

On a contrasting note, Ajibola (2022) highlighted Professor Babagana Zulum's, a prominent A.P.C. member and the Governor of Borno State, endorsement of Shettima's selection as wise. Zulum emphasized Shettima's patriotism and his profound understanding of the social, cultural, religious, economic, and political fabric of all states and the Federal Capital Territory. Zulum further praised Shettima's dedication to the unity of the country, which has been demonstrated on numerous occasions. (Go, 2023)

3.13 Media Framing in Nigeria

This theme is a reflection of the way Nigerian media sources prioritize, display, and analyze news in order to influence public opinion. The Nigerian media is heavily involved in shaping how topics are presented, which significantly impacts how individuals engage in politics.

Sub-Themes:

a. **Framing of Politics:** This sub-theme delves into how Nigerian media outlets portray political events, candidates, and topics, examining their influence on public perceptions of political figures and their agendas. Ogunleye (2008) provides valuable insights into the portrayal of political candidates, issues, and events in the Nigerian media. Through his research on the framing of political news stories in the media, Ogunleye explores various

techniques employed by Nigerian media to cover political events, such as analyzing language, tone, visuals, and sources selected for political news coverage.

b. Ethnic and Religious Framing: The study's sub-theme on ethnic and religious framing is crucial due to the longstanding animosities between different ethnic and religious groups. It sheds light on how the media depicts ethnic and religious divisions and its implications for national unity (Ikelegbe, 2006).

c. Gender Framing: This sub-theme examines how the media portrays gender-related issues and their impact on public opinion, a vital aspect of the Nigerian media landscape. According to Oyinade, Daramola, & Lamidi (2013), "*gender has become one of the fault-lines running through the political landscape of Nigeria since Independence in 1960, with Nigerian women actively challenging their societal roles.*" This has spurred the formation of women's movements in the country, further propelling women's struggles to the forefront. Ojebuyi and Chukwunwike (2018) highlighted the significance of gender framing in election campaigns through their study of press coverage during the 2015 presidential elections. Their findings revealed the marginalization of female politicians, suggesting that gender chauvinism could lead journalists to compromise fairness in election reporting. Other influencing factors identified include ownership, ethnicity, religion, political affiliation, and commercial interests.

d. Election Framing: An important sub-theme necessitating examination, as the Nigerian media has long played a critical role in highlighting election-related issues even before Independence. Prominent concerns during campaigns centered around insecurity and the

underperformance of the economy under the outgoing Muhammadu Buhari administration. These prevalent issues underscore how they shaped the election narrative (LeVan, 2023).

This literature review examines the theme of content framing and the impact of media ownership on the 2023 Nigerian Presidential Elections. It highlights key themes, outlines their characteristics, distinguishes sub-themes, and deliberates on important conclusions, trends, and gaps in existing literature. The study elucidates the intricate relationship between media content and ownership dynamics, using the backdrop of Nigeria's 2023 general elections. Its aim is to enhance our comprehension of how voter behavior, political discourse, and media framing are shaped. Through an examination of framing techniques, narratives, and their effects on public opinion, this research contributes to a crucial aspect of Nigeria's democratic journey and holds broader implications for the domain of political communication.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

Media channels such as radio, television, and newspapers play a pivotal role in disseminating information to the public and key decision-makers on political issues and current affairs. They act as vital conduits for communication between the governed and the government, facilitating the transmission of messages across the spectrum and ensuring effective two-way communication through feedback mechanisms.

Content analysis is a structured and objective approach that involves identifying trends, themes, and connections within textual, visual, or auditory content to offer both quantitative and qualitative insights into communication processes. The primary goal of content analysis is to recognize recurring patterns and relationships in communication materials, enabling a deeper understanding of the information conveyed (Krippendorff, 2013; Neuendorf, 2017). By employing this research technique, content can be systematically coded and categorized to generate valuable interpretations and findings (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Scholars across various disciplines have contributed to the evolution and application of content analysis methodologies, each offering distinct viewpoints on the systematic investigation method for research purposes. Krippendorff (2018) highlights the importance of reliability, validity, and the researcher's interpretive role, while Berelson, in his seminal work "*Content Analysis in Communication Research*," underscores the systematic and objective analysis of specific communication attributes. His research focuses on the value of comprehending media content and its relevance to communication studies (1952:204). Holsti (1969) discusses the systematic examination of contents, coding methodologies, and the

significance of content analysis in elucidating patterns and themes in textual data. Neuendorf, author of "*The Content Analysis Guidebook*," presents a similar definition to Holsti's, describing content analysis as the identification of patterns, themes, and associations in textual or visual data. Additionally, besides offering practical guidance for researchers utilizing content analysis, her work addresses crucial methodological concerns (2017). Also, in their book, *The General Inquirer: A Computer Approach to Content Analysis (1966)*, Stone et al. concentrate on the application of content analysis in a computerized context and explore how computers can support systematic content analysis.

The selection of this method is driven by several factors: firstly, it allows researchers to analyze material in an unbiased and objective manner through its methodical and rigorous analysis of written, visual, or auditory data (Neuendorf, *ibid*). Secondly, it facilitates cross-sectional and longitudinal research by enabling the comparison of data from different sources or time periods (Krippendorff, *ibid*). Thirdly, content analysis assists in categorizing vast amounts of data into manageable groups to facilitate drawing conclusions and identifying patterns (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

This research technique is utilized to identify words and concepts within text and investigate their interrelationships. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2006), there are five primary objectives for using content analysis as a research method:

- a. describing communication content
- b. monitoring trends in content
- c. testing hypotheses regarding message characteristics

- d. evaluating the representation of specific social groups in the media
- e. laying the groundwork for studies on media effects

While content analysis research can fall into any of these categories, the most prevalent conventional goal is often the first (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006, p. 151). According to Krippendorff, content analysis provides qualitative information about how certain frames affect public opinion in addition to quantitative data on the prevalence of particular frames. This is crucial to the thesis because it integrates more in-depth interpretive analysis with quantifiable trends. Furthermore, Neuendorf (2017) contends that by offering a repeatable framework for content coding and analysis, the methodology reduces researcher bias. This is crucial in a thesis like this one that deals with media framing because the conclusions can be influenced by personal interpretations.

4.1 Data Collection

Data collection involves systematically acquiring information and data to validate hypotheses and address research inquiries. Various methods for collecting data include *Experimental studies* - that manipulate independent variables in controlled environments to evaluate their impact on dependent variables (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 2008); *Surveys* for gathering data from a sample of individuals using structured questionnaires or interviews (Dillman et al., 2014); *Interviews* where researchers collect information through open-ended or semi-structured questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2011); and *Secondary data analysis*, enabling researchers to analyze existing data sources (Bryman, 2016).

However, data collection for this study primarily relies on content analysis—a method that involves methodically analyzing texts, documents, or other forms of communication to identify patterns, themes, and meanings (Krippendorff, 2018). This approach aims to uncover and understand patterns or themes within textual content. Content analysis is chosen as the most suitable method for this study due to its systematic examination of textual materials, its adaptable application for quantitative or qualitative analysis, and its provision of an objective means to measure and classify the presence and frequency of specific frames within a dataset (Neuendorf, 2002). For a study analyzing how *The Nation* and *ThisDay* framed the 2023 Nigerian elections, content analysis provides the best fit as it provides an objective, methodical way to quantify and categorize media frames. It can handle large datasets with ease, identify communication patterns and trends, and is especially useful for testing hypotheses.

These features highlight the reasons why, considering the research's emphasis on locating and contrasting recurrent frames in media, content analysis—as promoted by Neuendorf—is especially appropriate for examining how *The Nation* and *ThisDay* framed the 2023 elections.

4.2 Selection Strategy

A total of 339 articles related to the election were published in both newspapers in the 30 days between January 25 and February 24, 2023. These specific days coincide with the campaign peaks, when each political party competed for attention and invested heavily in advertisements (La Raja & Schaffner, 2015). Consequently, choosing the 30 days allows for capturing the framing dynamics during crucial phases of the election process.

The articles, in four distinct news categories (opinions, news, editorials, and politics), were carefully curated for this study. Selecting these articles was contingent upon evaluating the study's scope, accessibility, and the digital resources at hand. By selecting all these articles, the research will generate conclusions that are both representative and sufficiently accurate.

Considering the extensive number of news outlets in Nigeria amounting to over 750 (Ikibe, 2017), this study focuses on two prominent newspapers, namely, *The Nation* and *ThisDay*. The choice to analyze content from these two outlets specifically is a strategic decision, owing to the logistical complexity of assessing content from every media organization countrywide during the research duration. The selection of *The Nation* and *ThisDay* was based on several factors outlined earlier in Chapter 2, including their ownership structures, ideological bias, and national readership coverage.

The ownership structures of privately owned media houses play a pivotal role in determining the content they disseminate. Given that politically influential individuals often have stakes in these media entities, the anticipation of their influence on pre-, during-, and post-election content underscores the significance of ownership structures in shaping media output.

Established on January 22, 1995, with offices in all 36 states of Nigeria and in foreign countries, *ThisDay* claims to be:

...Nigeria's most authoritative news media available on all platforms for the political, business, professional and diplomatic elite and broader middle classes while serving

as the meeting point of new ideas, culture and technology for the aspirational and millennials. The newspaper is a public trust dedicated to the pursuit of truth and reason covering a range of issues from breaking news to politics, business, the markets, the arts, sports and community to the crossroads of people and society (ThisDay, n.d.).

The proprietor, Nduka Obaigbena, has a background in politics, having contested for a senatorial position in 1991 and being elected as a member of the Constitutional Conference in 1994. Leading the *ThisDay* Media Group, which includes Arise Television, Obaigbena maintains close ties with political figures, particularly within the People's Democratic Party (PDP), often drawing criticism for perceived lack of neutrality (Daramola, 2023).

On the other hand, *The Nation* newspaper does not disclose its ownership structure on its website, asserting independence from vested interests and pledging allegiance solely to the nation. Founded on July 31, 2006, the organization and its affiliate, TVC, a television broadcasting network, are closely associated with the eventual winner of the election Bola Tinubu, and the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC). This relationship led to an assault on the newspaper premises during the 2020 #EndSars demonstrations (Kabir, 2020), acknowledged by Tinubu himself when he stated his involvement as a "promoter and financial backer" of both media enterprises (Oluokun, 2020). Allegations of bias persist due to these political connections (Udende et al., 2017, p. 239). Despite being embroiled in a 'fake news' controversy (Lime, 2018), *The Nation* continues to flourish as one of Nigeria's most influential newspapers (The Nation, 2012).

In terms of employee compensation, it is widely believed that both media organizations offer higher pay compared to government-owned media organizations in Nigeria, such as the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN). These government-owned organizations typically pay lower salaries due to financial constraints and bureaucratic limitations, despite offering greater job security (Omenugha & Oji, 2008). The private media sector in Nigeria, in contrast, is known for its competitive nature, with compensation and rewards being largely performance-based. As highlighted in Olufemi's study (2016), this competitiveness not only leads to increased pay but also fosters a higher standard of journalism. Reporters are incentivized to deliver quality work to earn bonuses and progress in their careers. According to an analysis conducted by the International Press Centre (IPC) in 2019, journalists working in government-owned media earn considerably less on average than their counterparts in private media organizations. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect a higher standard of professionalism from *The Nation* and *ThisDay*, as they are better remunerated and more motivated than their counterparts in government-owned media.

The comparison of ideological bias between *The Nation* and *ThisDay* newspapers is straightforward, given their clear preferences for political parties. *The Nation* provides its readers with the necessary information to uphold democracy and federalism in Nigeria, while *ThisDay* emphasizes its commitment to democracy, innovation, and appeal to a wide audience through its news reporting, editorials, lifestyle features, and business coverage. Both newspapers are widely read in Nigeria and have a significant online presence, with *The Nation* boasting the third highest daily circulation of 30,000 copies in the country and pioneering same-day production across multiple states. In its initial years of publication,

ThisDay achieved the Newspaper of the Year Award for three consecutive years. In 1997, it pioneered full-color printing in Nigeria and operates printing facilities in Lagos, Abuja, and the Niger Delta. The newspaper boasts an average daily circulation of 9,500 copies and a weekly internet penetration rate of 14% (Media Planning Guide, 2022; Adeyemo, 2023).

Both newspapers were chosen for their widespread accessibility and circulation throughout the country. Apart from their extensive readership and national coverage, they offer e-paper versions that are easily accessible for academic purposes. Hence, it is appropriate to compare the two media organizations based on these approximate statistics.

While *The Nation* and *ThisDay* are privately owned entities, their management approaches vary significantly. The newly elected president, Mr. Bola Tinubu is the owner of *The Nation* but maintains a respectful distance from the organization. Vintage Press Limited, the publisher of *The Nation*, operates under a Board of Directors led by Victor Ifijeh, a respected journalist serving as the Managing Director and Editor-in-Chief. This ownership model enables the management team to operate independently without overt undue interference from the owner regarding media content ("The Nation," n.d.).

In contrast, Mr. Nduka Obaigbena plays a hands-on role as the owner of *ThisDay* newspaper, where he serves as the Chairman/Chief Executive Officer/Editor-in-Chief. Despite having a designated Managing Director/Chief Operating Officer on the management team, Obaigbena, a former journalist himself (*ThisDay*, n.d.), retains direct supervisory control as the Chairman of *ThisDay* Media Group, the newspaper's publisher. This hands-on approach positions him to directly influence editorial content, a departure from the ownership structure of *The Nation*

4.3 Data Collection Procedures

Considering the concluded 2023 Nigeria General Elections, conducting a content analysis was possible due to the online presence of the two media sources selected for the study, which is focused on the final thirty days leading up to election day on February 25, 2023. These specific dates were chosen as they fell within the peak campaign period when political parties intensively vied for public attention and allocated substantial funds to advertising. Adhering to Nigerian electoral regulations, which prohibit campaigning within 24 hours of the election, the study's population comprises 339 election-related articles in the two chosen newspapers (157 in *The Nation*, and 182 in *ThisDay*) published between January 25, 2023, and February 24, 2023 (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2022, Section 47(2)).

This method was chosen because only certain days contained content relevant to the study, and a total of 339 articles, which represented the total number of election-related articles in both newspapers between January 25 and February 24, 2023, were selected considering their relevance to the subject of analysis.

4.4 Themes and Concepts

Three principal conceptual frameworks guided this research, laying the groundwork for subsequent data collection and analysis. These thematic areas are crucial in achieving the study's objectives.

i. Nigeria's 2023 Presidential Election: This election stands as a momentous event characterized by intense political competition and critical discussions on security, governance, and economic development. The significance of this election warrants scholarly

exploration due to its addressing of pertinent issues and the electorate's demand for transformative leadership (Ake, 1996; Abrahamsen, 2005).

ii. Public Opinion: Public opinion encompasses the collective views and inclinations of a particular community or group regarding various sociocultural, political, or economic matters. Zaller's seminal work in 1992 on public opinion dynamics and formation provides crucial insights for analyzing this phenomenon. Neumann et al. (2014) suggest that scrutinizing media content, such as news articles and television programs, offers a profound understanding of public sentiment.

iii. Media Framing: Media framing, as described by Entman (1993), involves the deliberate selection and accentuation of certain aspects of news articles or subjects while diminishing or overlooking others. Research employing content analysis helps reveal prevalent framing patterns in media content. Furthermore, the concept of media ownership, defined as the financial or legal control exerted by individuals, businesses, or governments over media organizations, is intricately linked to framing practices. This control extends to shaping these organizations' political inclinations, editorial principles, and content (Bagdikian, 1983).

4.5 Research Design

Using a content analysis methodology, this study meticulously examined the impact of media framing on public perceptions within the context of Nigeria's upcoming 2023 presidential elections. This rigorous approach facilitated an in-depth exploration of media framing standards and a comprehensive understanding of the contextual factors influencing content. By assessing how diverse media platforms portray significant issues and candidates,

the study provides valuable insights into the influence of media framing on voter attitudes and behaviors.

4.5.i Media Sources and Coding Scheme

The Nation and *ThisDay* were chosen as the two media outlets that best align with the research framework (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). These privately owned media entities, chosen based on criteria such as ownership structure, influence, audience reach, and national coverage, have affiliations with business or political entities. Consequently, a customized coding scheme was formulated and tailored to the Nigerian political landscape, drawing insights from established framing theories (Goffman, 1974; Entman, 1993). The study therefore focused on three potential bias areas: tone of coverage, candidate framing, and problem framing. Categories such as news genre (editorial, column, news, or section), story sources (staff, guest writer), story slant (positive, negative, or neutral), and dominant frames (corruption, insecurity, economy, governance) were employed as content parameters for this investigation.

4.6 Operational Definition of Terms

Corruption as a Dominant Frame: During the campaign period, there has been a noticeable and sustained emphasis by political figures, the media, and vested parties on matters concerning corruption. By highlighting issues such as allegations of graft, embezzlement, nepotism, abuse of authority, and the lack of openness within political and governmental entities, this framework effectively illustrates the primary focus of discussions related to corruption.

Components

- a. Frequency of References: The frequency at which terms associated with corruption (like bribery, graft, embezzlement, and corruption) are mentioned in media coverage during the electoral campaign.
- b. Contextual Emphasis: The extent to which deliberations on the nation's challenges, primary policy objectives, and the suitability or unsuitability of political contenders revolve around corruption as a major issue. A thorough assessment of the context in which corruption is deliberated is imperative for this purpose.
- c. Origin of Claims: Identifying and appraising the credibility and public credibility of key sources—including political adversaries, investigative journalists, and anti-corruption bodies—that level allegations of corruption.
- d. Public Perception and Feedback: Conducting surveys among the populace to gauge how the corruption narrative shapes voter attitudes and actions. This involves monitoring changes in public sentiment throughout the campaign period.
- e. Analytical Methodology: Analyzing the discourse and language employed by politicians and the media in portraying corruption, with a focus on emotional appeals and narratives (Fairclough, 2003).
- f. Importance: Recognizing that corruption featured prominently in the Nigerian presidential election of 2023 provides valuable insights into how political communication and the media influence public sentiment. It underscores the impact of narratives around corruption on

democratic processes and emphasizes the importance of accountability and transparency in the electoral landscape.

ii. Insecurity as a Dominant Frame: The term "national and personal security" with regards to the 2023 Nigerian presidential election denotes the conscious and continued emphasis put forth by political individuals, the media, and invested parties on security issues during the course of the campaign. This framework encapsulates various security-related subjects, including the levels of threat posed by terrorism, crime rates, insurgencies, military activities, and measures for public safety.

Components:

a. Frequency of Mention: Tracking how often security-related terms (such as "terrorism," "insurgency," "crime," "safety," etc.) were referenced in media coverage throughout the election campaign.

b. Contextual Emphasis: Assessing the extent to which security is highlighted as a central concern in conversations concerning the country's challenges, policy priorities, and the candidates' capability to handle them; this involves the context in which security is linked to topics like development, social cohesion, or governance.

c. Source of Information: Identifying primary sources—like governmental reports, security agencies, media outlets, and political figures—that provide insights on insecurity and assessing their credibility and public perception.

d. **Public Perception and Reaction:** Conducting surveys to gauge how the theme of insecurity impacts voters' attitudes and behaviors. This process involves tracking changes in public opinion over the campaign period and assessing the effect of security concerns on voter preferences.

e. **Methodology for Analysis:** Employing a systematic content analysis of campaign-related materials in the two selected newspapers to quantify the frequency and context of references to security during the election period (Neuendorf, 2017).

f. **Significance:** Recognizing that security will be a prevalent theme in Nigeria's 2023 presidential race provides valuable insights into how the media and political discussions influence public sentiment. It highlights the impact of security narratives on democratic procedures and underscores the importance of personal and national security in electoral dynamics.

iii. Economy as a Dominant Frame: The media's focus on economic issues during the 2023 Nigerian presidential election, covering fiscal management, job creation, inflation, poverty reduction, economic growth, and policies, is recognized as the "dominant economic frame."

Components:

a. **Frequency of Economic Mentions:** Throughout the election campaign, tracking the frequency of economic terms like jobs, inflation, poverty, growth, fiscal policy, and economy in political speeches, ads, and media coverage.

- b. Contextual Significance: Examining how economic issues interconnect with social stability, governance, and overall national progress in discussions.
- c. Source Evaluation: Identifying primary sources of economic information and assessing their reliability and public perception.
- d. Public Opinion and Reaction Monitoring: Analyzing shifts in public sentiment during the campaign and assessing how economic concerns influence voter preferences.
- e. Analysis Approach: Evaluating the frequency and context of economic references in political speeches, advertisements, and media coverage through systematic content analysis (Neuendorf, 2017).
- f. Importance: Recognizing the pivotal role of the economy in the 2023 Nigerian presidential election provides insights into how media and political discussions mold public views. It underscores the significance of economic matters in electoral processes and the impact of economic narratives on democracy.

iv. Governance as a Dominant Frame: This thematic focus relates to the quality, efficiency, and ethical standards of governmental activities. It covers various aspects of governance, such as accountability, transparency, adherence to the rule of law, delivery of public services, and institutional performance.

Components

- a. **Frequency of Mention:** The frequency at which concepts linked to governance—such as accountability, transparency, rule of law, and public service—were referenced in political speeches, advertisements, and media coverage across the electoral campaign.
- b. **Contextual Emphasis:** To what extent did the campaign highlight governance as a central concern in discussions on the nation's challenges and primary policy objectives?
- c. **Information Source:** Determining and assessing the credibility and public reception of primary sources—such as political figures, media platforms, and civil society organizations—that provide governance-related information.
- d. **Public Perception and Reaction:** The study gathered public opinion from the two newspapers to gauge how the framing of governance impacts voter perspectives and actions. This involved tracking changes in public sentiment throughout the campaign and assessing the influence of governance issues on voter preferences.
- e. **Methodology of Analysis:** Analyze how candidates and the media present governance issues through language and rhetoric, focusing on metaphors, narratives, and emotional appeals (Fairclough, 2003).
- f. **Significance:** The predominant governance narrative in the 2023 Nigerian presidential election reveals insights into how political communication and media content shape public sentiment.

v. News slant

Depending on the media outlet, a news report's bias is commonly characterized by its level of positivity, negativity, or neutrality. As a result, the study developed a coding sheet and guide to collect data for the investigation. Following the coding of each article, the research examined the data to identify the prevalence of different perspectives and sources, as well as trends in the overall tone of each category of the articles.

This research employed content analysis to classify sources and headlines into positive, negative, neutral, and biased categories to illustrate how public perceptions were influenced by media framing leading up to the 2023 elections. Any journalistic piece, editorial, or media content portraying a candidate in a favorable light and highlighting their qualifications, policies, and positive attributes falls under the positive category. As argued by Entman (1993), such framing techniques can potentially sway the audience to form a more positive view of the subject by emphasizing its merits and positive characteristics. These media publications underscored the achievements and strengths of the candidate while mitigating or overlooking their weaknesses.

Conversely, research by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) suggests that negative framing may fuel audience skepticism and disapproval, thereby detrimentally affecting their perceptions and judgments. As a result, it was deemed unfavorable to disseminate any news report, article, or opinion piece that portrayed a candidate in a negative light, criticized them, or highlighted their deficiencies or controversial stances. An unbiased source offered an equitable evaluation of the candidates without explicitly endorsing or criticizing them, maintaining objectivity and impartiality. Neutral framing facilitates presenting a well-

rounded perspective, which is advantageous for an enlightened and discerning audience, as posited by scholars such as McQuail (2010).

Identifying media bias in headlines can be pivotal in detecting prejudice and partiality in the language or phrasing representing the newspaper's editorial stance. Specific words in headlines can elicit particular emotions or associations, which can signify bias. For example, the choice between using terms like "clashes" or "protests," or "terrorist" and "militant," can significantly influence how a story is portrayed. A biased headline may selectively present information or employ emphatic language or insinuations to influence readers' perceptions of the candidate. A good example was the reportage of candidate Bola Tinubu's campaign rally in Lagos on February 21, 2023. *ThisDay* led with the headline "***Tinubu Shuts Down Lagos, as APC Holds Rally***" (James 2023) while *The Nation* carried reports from the rally with the banner headline "***Why I Seek Your Mandate to Be President, by Tinubu***" (Oladesu et al., 2023). Going by the above, it is obvious that *ThisDay* and *The Nation* framed the headlines of the same event differently to provoke different emotions in the voter. While *ThisDay* implied that there was a breakdown of law and order occasioned by the rally, *The Nation* on the other hand framed the rally as a presentation of the manifesto of the APC candidate. This amply demonstrates Nabi's (2003) argument regarding the impact of emotions such as fear, anger, and happiness on cognitive and behavioral results.

In the pre-election period, the media played a significant role in shaping public opinion by focusing on topics that aligned with existing narratives, even after a court of law had issued a ruling. Since headlines have a strong impact on readers' initial understanding

and reaction to the content, they are powerful tools for framing discussions (Richardson, 2007).

vi. Tone and language

In the context of this study, the term "tone" pertains to the overall attitude, mood, or emotional stance conveyed by the author in the article (Ghanem, 1997). The use of language in the media can reveal hidden biases and influence the narrative in favor of specific political or ideological stances, as stated by Richardson (2007). The emotional response of viewers to news stories is markedly affected by the tone employed. A negative tone can draw attention to flaws, criticism, and doubt, whereas a positive tone can emphasize achievements, optimism, and support.

It is essential to present information objectively, free from overt emotional influences, utilizing a neutral tone. Analyzing the media's tone of coverage is crucial in discerning whether the reporting is unbiased, critical, or supportive of the individuals or topics being discussed. According to Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), the tone of news coverage significantly shapes public perceptions of political figures and events.

vii. Candidate framing

Iyengar (1991) defines candidate framing as the intentional portrayal and presentation of political candidates in the media. An extensive analysis of the campaign storylines, achievements, and controversies related to each candidate is conducted, focusing on their attributes, qualifications, policies, personality traits, and ideological perspectives. By systematically examining candidate framing, perceptions of political actors can be

influenced, and election results can be swayed through the application of strategic communication methods. The way candidates are depicted in the media significantly influences how voters perceive and behave. Negative framing can damage a candidate's reputation and reduce their chances of winning an election, while positive framing can enhance their reputation, appeal, and voter support.

Neutral framing, by providing an objective and unbiased viewpoint, aims to enable voters to form judgments based on a thorough understanding of each candidate's qualities and positions (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997).

viii. Issue coverage

This concept refers to the extent and frequency with which particular themes, issues, or topics related to an election are discussed in a publication (McLeod et al., 1999). The analysis involves tallying the mentions or discussions of each topic and assessing the overall attention devoted to each issue across different media platforms. The focus on issue coverage facilitates comprehension of the primary topics highlighted, their presentation, and how they impact public opinion and voter perceptions.

According to McCombs and Shaw (1972), *issue salience* — the frequency and prominence of coverage — plays a crucial role in shaping the public agenda by influencing the significance of topics based on the quantity and visibility of coverage.

ix. Importance of election-related subjects

Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) characterize importance as the extent to which matters concerning elections are discernible, crucial, and given precedence in media discussions. This involves evaluating the comparative significance or pertinence assigned to various issues based on factors such as headline positioning, lead item status, coverage frequency, and time allocation for each subject. Importance serves as a pivotal gauge of the topics deemed most vital by the media and those likely to shape public sentiment and voter conduct. It also includes scrutiny of whether certain subjects enjoy greater emphasis and the underlying reasons for this.

According to McCombs and Shaw (1972), the media wields significant influence in shaping the public agenda as issues that receive heightened attention are more probable to be deemed crucial by voters. Prominent issues possess the capacity to mold public conversations, influence voter perspectives, and ultimately impact electoral outcomes. In the 2023 election, several APC members switched allegiance to opposition factions due to the intense focus on the controversy surrounding the religious similarity between the candidate and vice presidential nominee (Abati, 2022).

x. Coverage of each electoral theme

This denotes the degree to which specific themes regarding context, analysis, and intricacy are elaborated upon in media outlets (Gans, 2004). It involves evaluating the thoroughness, complexity, and completeness of the information presented—including foundational details, historical perspectives, expert evaluations, and stakeholder viewpoints—for each theme. This assessment seeks to determine the extent to which subjects are explored in detail versus brevity, and whether intricate concepts and conflicting

viewpoints are accurately depicted in the media. The depth of coverage, as depicted in media reports, is crucial in assessing the public's level of awareness and sophistication concerning electoral issues. Ensuring voters possess a profound understanding of the intricacies and challenges related to elections is imperative. This process not only enhances public awareness but also fosters active participation, empowering individuals to make well-informed decisions based on a comprehensive grasp of relevant issues. According to Iyengar (1991), extensive media coverage plays a crucial role in augmenting public consciousness, thereby nurturing a knowledgeable electorate.

xi. News Content Sources

This pertains to the origins of the data under scrutiny. Identifying news content sources involves categorizing and pinpointing the entities or individuals responsible for producing, disseminating, or influencing the content under investigation. Primary sources such as journalists, news outlets, governmental bodies, eyewitnesses, and official statements can serve as the origin of this data (Schudson, 2011). Additionally, since the trustworthiness of media coverage relies on the credibility and expertise of its sources, variations in biases, credibility, and authority among sources may exist. Diverse sources ensure comprehensive and unbiased reporting on election-related subjects, representing multiple perspectives and mitigating the risk of creating echo chambers.

xii. Types of News Content

News content categories are essential in content analysis to classify and organize the diverse information conveyed through media platforms. The categorizations outlined above

facilitate researchers in analyzing and interpreting various types of news content. These content forms encompass news reports, opinions, broadcast news segments, editorial or commentary pieces, official statements, and social media updates (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). Recognizing that different content types cater to distinct audience segments aids in assessing the extent to which media coverage informs and engages diverse voter demographics. Scholars may design coding frameworks to categorize news content based on these standards, simplifying systematic analysis and comparisons across different media outlets and scenarios. It is necessary to proffer a clear definition and distinction among the four news categories—**news**, **opinions**, **politics** and **editorials**— for a better understanding of the subject matter.

Harcup (2021) defines '*News*' as a factual report on recent events, developments, or issues of public interest intended to inform the audience with accurate, unbiased, and timely information. '*Opinion*' pieces, Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014) asserted, reflect the writer's personal views rather than objective news reporting. They often include commentary, analysis, or advocacy on current events and issues. The '*Politics*' category bears similarities with News and Opinion because it may include both news reporting and opinion-based analysis, but it solely covers news related to government, policies, elections, and political movements and focuses on the actions of politicians, legislative developments, and the broader political landscape (McNair, 2018). Finally, '*Editorials*' is the official position of the newspaper on any particular issue. They are written by the editorial board and provide analysis, criticism, or recommendations on political, economic, or social matters (Meyer, 2002).

4.7 Unit of analysis in Social Science research

In social science research, the unit of analysis focuses on a specific aspect of study. It refers to the level of social reality where empirical data is collected and analyzed, as described by Healey (2018). Selecting the appropriate unit of analysis is crucial for determining the research methodology, depending on the study's goals and topic. Healey defines this unit as a tool that helps researchers align their decisions with the study's objectives and questions by identifying the core entities or elements under investigation. Moreover, it emphasizes the need to justify the selection of analytical units during the research process (Outhwaite & Turner, 2007).

4.8 Framing in Content Analysis research

Framing serves as a theoretical framework in content analysis research. For instance, in analyzing news reports on the 2023 Nigerian presidential elections, the unit of analysis was each of the 339 articles selected from the two newspapers and focus of the thesis is to find the portrayal of bias, if any, in the articles and its impact on voter behavior and election preferences. Systematic sampling will ensure a representative selection from the chosen media sources. The selection of this unit of study aligns with the research objectives, enabling a comprehensive examination of the frames utilized and their influence on information framing during the 2023 Nigerian presidential elections.

4.9 Qualitative Case Studies

i. Criteria for Selection: In this study, two media sources have been chosen for qualitative case studies based on their significance in shaping patterns during the 2023 elections.

Criteria for selecting these two media outlets include their impact on public discourse, methods of framing, and ownership influence.

ii. Analysis of Data: Analyzed news stories, opinion pieces, and editorials regarding the 2023 general elections through thematic analysis revealed recurrent themes and patterns. The focus of the investigation was on identifying emerging themes associated with media actions during the elections and comprehending the influence of media framing on public perspectives. Specifically, the research concentrated on the tone and framing of media content throughout the elections and their portrayal of candidates in either a positive or negative light.

4.10 Restating Research Questions

Restating research questions in a thesis is helpful for a few reasons. First, it aids in bringing the reader's emphasis back to the main objectives of the study (Creswell, 2014) and helps to remind the reader what the study is about and clears up any confusion when discussing the findings (Bryman, 2016). They make it easier to link the study's goals with what was found, especially when the topic is complicated. Going back to the research questions, according to Silverman (2013), affords the researcher the opportunity to assess if the study worked well. We can check how well we answered those questions. Lastly, it keeps everything organized. Restating the questions gives a concise summary of the thesis and helps highlight its goals before wrapping it all up (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018).

Consequently, the Research Questions are as follows:

- i. How did *The Nation* and *Thisday* newspapers frame the major presidential candidates during the 2023 Nigerian elections, and what were the dominant frames used?
- ii. To what extent did *The Nation* and *ThisDay* newspapers prioritize the dominant frames and candidate attributes in their coverage of the 2023 Nigerian presidential election?
- iii. What differences can be observed in the framing strategies employed by *The Nation* and *Thisday* Newspapers in their portrayal of presidential candidates?
- iv. How did the frequency and prominence of coverage of specific candidates by *The Nation* and *ThisDay* newspapers shape the presentation of these candidates during the 2023 Nigerian elections, and what potential implications might this have for public perception?
- v. In what ways did Tinubu's ownership of *The Nation* influence the newspaper's coverage of the 2023 Nigerian elections?

To adequately answer the research questions, it is imperative to set some goals to best explain and enhance the understanding of framing theory and its impact on the media coverage of the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. The first goal will be to analyze the distribution of stories about the election in the two newspapers. Secondly, the in-depth study will systematically classify the types of news stories related to the election into relevant categories such as News, Opinion/Columns, Editorial and Politics section. The third goal is to identify the dominant frames used in the coverage of the elections while the fourth will be to determine how many times each of the candidates was mentioned in the headline/body of the 339 selected articles. Finally, it will attempt to understand how the coverage influenced public perception of the candidates and impacted the election outcome.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

This section presents the outcomes of the content analysis of the 2023 Nigerian presidential election coverage in *The Nation* and *ThisDay*. The analysis focused on the types and frequency of stories, the sections from which the articles were sourced, and the prevailing frames utilized in the reporting as well as the impact of media ownership on the outcome of the election. These findings shed light on how these influential newspapers influenced the public's perception of the electoral process.

5.1 Distribution of stories by newspaper

As stated in section 4.10 above, the first goal will be to analyze the distribution of stories about the election in the two newspapers. The frequency distribution of these stories is shown in Table 3 below:

Table 3: Distribution of Stories Frequency by Newspaper

NEWSPAPER	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
<i>The Nation</i>	157	46.31%
<i>ThisDay</i>	182	53.69%
Total	339	100%

Source: Researcher (2024)

Table 3 illustrates that *ThisDay* accounted for 53.69% of all election-related news coverage, a slightly higher percentage than *The Nation's* 46.31%. Based on the information provided, *The Nation* featured a slightly lower number of stories, showcasing 157 election-related articles during the defined period. In comparison, *ThisDay* presented 182 articles,

accounting for 53.69% of the total. This observation indicates that both newspapers extensively covered the 2023 elections, displaying an almost similar level of engagement with the subject.

5.2 Categories of News Stories

The second aim of our in-depth study was to systematically classify the types of news stories related to the election. It is worth establishing that the Nigerian media traditionally classify news and politics into different sections. These two sections, alongside the Editorial and Opinion/Column sections, form the four categories into which the reportage of the 2023 presidential elections is divided. Table 4 outlines the outcomes of this meticulous classification process:

Table 4: Categories of news stories containing 2023 election issues

THE NATION			THISDAY			TOTAL		
CATEGORIES	FREQ	%	CATEGORIES	FREQ	%	CATEGORIES	FREQ	%
News	105	66.9	News	128	70.4	News	233	69
Opinions	26	16.5	Opinions	17	9.4	Opinions	43	13
Politics	23	14.7	Politics	35	19.2	Politics	58	17
Editorial	03	1.9	Editorial	02	1.0	Editorial	05	1
TOTAL	157	100		182	100		339	100

Source: Researcher (2024)

Comparatively, there is a slight difference between *The Nation* and *ThisDay* newspapers' coverage of the 2023 Nigerian election cycle. At 70.4% in *ThisDay* and 66.9% in *The Nation*, news coverage accounted for most of both newspapers' election-related material, indicating a strong dedication to factual reporting. A news article in *The Nation*

headlined “**Poll: Armed Forces will be neutral –DHQ**” (Alli, 2023) reported how the military reiterated its neutrality in the elections, asked for the public's confidence and expressed the challenges and expectations from the polls. It read in part: “The Armed Forces of Nigeria notes with dismay the story being peddled around by some unscrupulous elements alleging that some military officers met with a presidential candidate with the aim of disrupting the general elections and setting the country on fire. The Armed Forces will never be part of any evil plot against our democracy.” Another article titled “**Breaking: U.S. Imposes Visa Restrictions on Nigerians Undermining Democracy**” published in *ThisDay*, reported the decision of the United States’ government to deny entry to politically exposed Nigerians who are found to be undermining the democratic process (*ThisDay*, 2023).

Only 9.4% of *ThisDay*'s material was opinion pieces, compared to 16.5% of *The Nation*'s, which suggests that *The Nation* places a greater emphasis on interpretive and analytical journalism. Opinion pieces such as “**Echoes from 1993**” (Dare, 2023) in which the writer provided historical context and insights into Nigeria's political evolution by reflecting on past events such as the 1993 presidential election which was annulled by the military government, to help readers understand the importance of safeguarding democratic principles. The media can frame events in ways that influence readers' interpretations and assessments of candidates and political issues by using opinion pieces to provide possibilities for nuanced comments (Entman, 1993).

Although it made up a sizable amount of the material in both publications, the Politics category was more prevalent in *ThisDay* (19.2%) than in *The Nation* (14.7%). This category typically includes in-depth exploration of political strategies, candidate profiles,

and party dynamics, aspects crucial for framing electoral narratives (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). A good example will be “*Questions for INEC before the first ballot*” (Christian, 2023) which questioned the preparedness, transparency, and ability of the electoral body to conduct a free and fair election.

Shoemaker and Reese (1996) note that the type of news story and its placement can significantly influence the perceived importance and relevance of an issue by the public.

5.3 Dominant Frames in News Stories

The third goal was to identify the dominant frames used in the coverage of the 2023 presidential elections. Table 5 illustrates these frames:

Table 5: Dominant frames in all the stories about the 2023 elections

	THE NATION		THISDAY		TOTAL	
<u>PROMINENT</u>	<u>FREQ</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>FRE</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>FREQ</u>	<u>%</u>
<u>FRAMES</u>			<u>Q</u>			
Corruption	18	35.3	33	64.7	51	15.05
Insecurity	29	58	21	42	50	14.75
Religion/ Ethnicity	14	37.9	23	62.1	37	10.91
Candidate Suitability	51	55.5	41	44.5	92	27.14
Vice- President	30	43.5	39	56.5	69	20.35
Economy	09	37.5	15	62.5	24	7.08

Others	10	62.5	06	37.5	16	4.72
	161		178		339	100

Source: Researcher (2024)

Table 5 illustrates the focal points of media discussions during the election period. According to the data, the analysis showed that "Candidate Suitability" was the most dominant frame, accounting for 27.14% of the content. *The Nation* accounted for 55% while *ThisDay* had 45% of all the articles that addressed the suitability of the candidates for high office. This framework focused extensively on the character and experience of key contenders, particularly Bola Ahmed Tinubu from the All Progressives Congress (APC). Media coverage often highlighted the qualifications and integrity of the candidates, exemplified by the scrutiny of Tinubu's background and educational history (Sahara Reporters, 2022). This focus is consistent with framing theories, which hold that the media significantly influences how people view candidates' viability by frequently emphasizing their personal histories and leadership attributes (Entman, 1993). The importance of this framing may also reflect how the media shapes voters' perceptions of a candidate's abilities and disabilities, which is crucial during election seasons (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). This is highlighted by then vice-presidential candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Senator Kashim Shettima who said the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) presidential candidate, Atiku Abubakar deserved no support from the Northeastern region for his ambition to be president. The Nation reported Shettima as saying: "You cannot vote for someone that did eight years as vice president without doing eight projects in his place. You cannot vote for someone that was vice president for eight years without empowering eight people. Atiku does not empower people" (Duku, 2023). Conversely, The Nation also

framed Tinubu as a desirable candidate when it reported thusly: “*N’Delta agitators endorse Tinubu, say he will make a good President,*” about the endorsement of the APC candidate by the regional separatist group, Niger Delta Liberation Movement (NDLM). The group, which claimed to be the most dreaded militant group in Niger Delta, agreed to mobilize everything within its power to see to the emergence of Tinubu as the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria because “he (Tinubu) is not like other political gladiators that go into hiding in other countries after failing elections” (Edremoda, February 2023). This was a veiled reference to PDP candidate, Abubakar Atiku who relocated to the United Arab Emirates after losing the previous 2019 presidential elections.

The frame concerning the "Choice of Vice-Presidential Candidates" followed as the second most common, featuring in 20.35% of the stories. This frame gained significance due to the debate surrounding Tinubu's selection of a vice-presidential candidate who shared his religious beliefs. This decision sparked intense discussions within the APC and across Nigeria's diverse religious landscape. The prominence of the vice-presidential selection frame (20.35%) suggests that running mate choices significantly influenced public perception and highlighted the importance of political affiliations of the presidential candidates. The religious background of the APC vice-presidential candidate became a notable topic for media coverage due to its departure from the traditional practice of aligning candidates with their professed faith. The decision by Candidate Tinubu to select a fellow Muslim, Kassim Shettima, as his vice-presidential candidate sparked controversy within his party, with even influential members like Yakubu Dogara, former Speaker of the Nigerian parliament and a member of the ruling APC quoted as saying:

The crucial role we can play as Christians is to examine the character of the candidates running for offices especially the highest office in the country and disavow those of them that we know are not a reflection of our moral ethos. Thanks to the leadership of CAN (Christian Association of Nigeria) for long taking a stand against the Muslim – Muslim ticket of the APC mainly because it is capable of polarising our politics along religious line. They wanted a balanced ticket so that all of us, Muslims and Christians in Nigeria will unite behind it to build a nation that works for all of us (Orizu, 2023).

The candidate of the PDP and his vice presidential pick got an endorsement from a youth group which described the party's flagbearers as the best option to transform Nigeria in the report published by *ThisDay* under the headline "**2023: Atiku, Okowa Best Option To Transform Nigeria**" (*ThisDay*, 2023). As a mark of appreciation for his choice of vice presidential candidate, the APC candidate also had a massive rally organised for him in Nigeria's influential northwest state of Kebbi by the women's wing of the party. The Nation reported that the women endorsed APC and affirmed that "a vote for Tinubu/Shettima presidency is a vote for a peaceful Nigeria" (Saidu, 2023) at the rally which had the wives of both candidates in attendance.

Additionally, other noteworthy frames included "Insecurity" (14.75%) and "Corruption" (15.05%), highlighting crucial issues in Nigerian politics. These frames underscored the importance of media scrutiny in evaluating the candidates' abilities to

address the nation's persistent challenges. To buttress the insecurity frame, *ThisDay* reported that: “**IG: Police, Other Security Agencies to Deploy over 400,000 Personnel for Polls**” (Elumoye, 2023) to reflect the state of preparedness of the security agencies in forestalling any breakdown of law and order which could disrupt the elections. The newspaper also reported on the corruption theme with a publication headlined “**EFCC Denies Raiding Tinubu’s House, Recovery of N400bn**” (Nwezeh, 2023) which projected the APC candidate in negative light as being of questionable character. The prevalence of corruption and insecurity in the election discourse emphasizes the media's influential role in shaping public perspectives on these critical subjects.

5.4 Frequency of Mention of each of the candidates

The fourth goal, in the effort to answer the research questions, is to determine how many times each of the candidates were mentioned in the headline/body of the 339 selected articles from both newspapers. In a study like this, tracking how often each candidate is mentioned is essential to comprehending how media coverage might affect public opinion and voting behavior. The frequency of news coverage of candidates can be used as a measure of agenda-setting, according to McCombs and Shaw (1972). This theory holds that the more often a topic or individual is covered by the media, the more important it is in the public's perception.

The results are presented in Table 6 below:

Table 6: Frequency of mention of each of the candidates by the two selected newspapers’ headlines

	THE NATION				THISDAY				
	<u>News</u>	<u>Editorial</u>	<u>Column</u>	<u>Politics</u>	<u>News</u>	<u>Editorial</u>	<u>Column</u>	<u>Politics</u>	
Tinubu	46	00	07	15	43	00	04	13	128
Atiku	18	00	00	06	37	00	01	08	70
Obi	18	00	00	06	17	00	02	04	47
Kwankwaso	06	00	00	01	06	00	00	02	15

Source: Researcher (2024)

The Nation and *ThisDay* newspapers' data on the number of times the 2023 Nigerian presidential candidates were mentioned shows clear editorial trends and prioritizes some candidates over others. With 46 mentions in the news section and more in the column and politics sections, *The Nation* shows a keen interest in Bola Tinubu. This trend is consistent with the paper's historically positive assessment of Tinubu's party, the All Progressives Congress (APC). Peter Obi and Atiku Abubakar, on the other hand, were mentioned much less frequently, suggesting a potential editorial bias consistent with the newspaper's political stance. Rabiw Kwankwaso, on the other hand, had very few mentions in any of the categories.

While Bola Tinubu continued to dominate coverage with 43 mentions in the news and 13 in politics, *ThisDay* showed a more evenly distributed distribution of mentions among the contenders. *ThisDay* may have taken a more impartial stance in its reporting, as Atiku Abubakar garnered almost equal attention with 37 news mentions. This, however, could be attributed to the newspaper owner's affiliation with Abubakar's PDP, even if he has no official role (Okon-Ekong, 2019).

It's noteworthy, though, that Atiku and Tinubu garnered more media attention than Peter Obi, who had a lot of popular support during the polls. Obi and Kwankwaso's under-

representation in both newspapers raises the possibility that, despite their significance in the 2023 elections, media coverage did not fairly depict their political significance, which could have affected public opinion and voting patterns.

This trend of candidate mentions is consistent with previous research that demonstrates how editorial policies and media ownership influence how issues are framed and how candidates are portrayed (Entman, 1993; McQuail, 2010). Newspapers run by people or organizations with strong political affiliations, for example, frequently feature articles about certain politicians, as was the case with *The Nation's* coverage of Tinubu. Such media framing has a significant effect on public opinion since voters may view particular candidates as more visible and legitimate if they are exposed to them repeatedly through editorial decisions (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

5.5 Impact of Media Ownership on election

The Nation newspaper's coverage of the 2023 elections played a significant role in shaping public discourse in favor of Tinubu. The study finds this assertion more pronounced in five major ways, namely:

i. **It encouraged a positive coverage of Tinubu's campaign:** *The Nation* consistently provided favorable coverage of Bola Tinubu's campaign, often highlighting his promises, endorsements, and political strategies. For example: the newspaper published an interview headlined “*Tinubu is God's unusual gift to Nigeria, says Tunji Bello*” (Kola-Dare, 2023) which portrayed Tinubu in a highly positive light, suggesting divine favor and exceptional leadership qualities. Another publication titled “*Tinubu will defeat LP, APGA in Anambra, Southeast*” (Elekwa, 2023) that implied Tinubu's strength in the Southeast region, a key

opposition stronghold and battleground in Nigerian politics. Finally, the newspaper also published “*I will deliver Ibom Deep Seaport, Tinubu assures*” (Bassey, 2023) to highlight the candidate’s commitment to infrastructure development, a key campaign promise.

ii. **Endorsements and Support:** *The Nation* frequently reported on endorsements from various groups and individuals, which burnished Tinubu's credibility and appeal to the masses. Headlines such as “*Middle Belt group roots for APC presidential candidate*” (Adam, 2023) and “*Yoruba Global Council endorses Tinubu*” (Egbe, 2023) underscored Tinubu's support from influential ethnic groups, which is significant in Nigeria’s heavily ethnicized politics.

iii. **Served as outlet for campaign promises and policy proposals:** *The Nation* extensively covered Tinubu's campaign promises, particularly those related to economic development, security, and infrastructure. For example: the newspaper reported “*Tinubu: we will use oil to develop Akwa Ibom*” (Badejo et al., 2023) and “*Tinubu vows to translate Kolmani oil to prosperity for Gombe, Northeast*” (Shittu, 2023) which both restated Tinubu's plans to leverage Nigeria's oil resources for regional development and economic transformation.

iv. **Countered opposition narratives:** *The Nation* was also instrumental in countering negative narratives from opposition parties. For example, an article headlined “*PDP, Atiku will take Nigeria back to food importation era, says APC PCC*” (Orintunsin, 2023) criticized Atiku Abubakar's economic policies while supporting Tinubu's vision for self-sufficiency. Another article “*PDP alleges plots by Tinubu to incite Nigerians, disrupt elections*” (Akinwale, 2023) refuted claims of Tinubu's involvement in election disruption, and positioned him as a victim of politically-motivated character assassination.

v. **Focused on Tinubu's political strength:** *The Nation* frequently highlighted Tinubu's political acumen and ability to secure votes across Nigeria with articles such as “*Tinubu's popularity lifted APC in Southeast*” (Onu, 2023) which credited Tinubu with revitalizing the APC's presence in the Southeast, a region traditionally dominated by other parties.

vi. **Tone and Framing:** The tone of **The Nation's** coverage was predominantly positive, often framing Tinubu as a visionary leader capable of addressing Nigeria's challenges. Articles frequently used terms like "victory," "prosperity," and "development" in relation to Tinubu's campaign, creating a narrative of hope and progress.

5.6 Summary of findings

The study on media framing during Nigeria's 2023 presidential election shows how media affects what people think. It looks at how news stories are presented and how they shape views on security and corruption (Entman, 1993). When the media highlights certain issues, it can steer public opinion. The research points out that media framing works hand in hand with the agenda-setting theory as McCombs and Shaw (1972). This means when the news focuses on topics like security, it helps set what people consider important. For example, when newspapers talked a lot about security, it made voters pay more attention to candidates' views on that issue (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987).

Another key finding is how media ownership plays a role in framing. Newspapers linked to political groups tended to present the election in ways that helped certain candidates, according to Herman & Chomsky's (1988) “propaganda model.” Based on an analysis of *The Nation* newspaper's coverage of the 2023 Nigerian presidential election, there is strong evidence that the newspaper's reporting significantly favored Tinubu. The

coverage played a crucial role in shaping public perception, reinforcing Tinubu's credibility, and downplaying negative stories that could have affected his electoral chances. This confirms already held beliefs and limit the variety of viewpoints out there. Such biases make it harder for people to understand the complexities of elections, which can hurt democratic engagement (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008).

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

The study's findings shed important light on Nigeria's 2023 presidential elections by *The Nation* and *ThisDay*. Both newspapers exhibited extensive coverage, suggesting a notable level of interest in the elections, evident in the nearly equal allocation of stories between them. The predominance of "News" content over "Opinions/Columns" and "Editorials" indicates a focus on objective reporting. Nevertheless, the inclusion of interpretive content suggests that the newspapers also played a role in shaping public opinion through opinion pieces.

Although there was no radical variation in the coverage between these two publications, the study's findings suggest that *ThisDay* approached the coverage of the 2023 presidential elections with more intensity. This outcome facilitates a clearer understanding of how different media outlets might prioritize or frame political events, influenced by their editorial policies or the preferences of their target audiences. As noted by Iyengar (1991), media outlets often differ in the significance they place on specific topics, impacting public perceptions and agenda-setting. According to McCombs and Shaw (1972), this focus is consistent with conventional journalistic norms, which state that news coverage should inform and update the public on election events to set the agenda for public discourse. The slight difference in their focus on news stories, however, can be the result of different editorial priorities or audience expectations, with *Thisday* taking a somewhat more expansive reporting stance to cover election dynamics in greater detail.

This disparity in *the two* newspapers' coverage of the 2023 Nigerian election implies that *The Nation* may prioritize offering its readers interpretive advice, either to reflect its

editorial position or to satisfy readers who are looking for more critical analysis. *ThisDay's* smaller percentage of opinion content, on the other hand, might be the result of a conscious decision to prioritize plain news coverage ahead of editorial influence, emphasizing reporting over framing.

ThisDay's greater focus on political coverage points to a more critical approach to the election, providing readers with information about the tactical aspects of campaigns. *The Nation* concentrates more on immediate news and interpretive comments, whereas *ThisDay* caters to readers who are interested in a more holistic view of political developments. This discrepancy may reflect different audience expectations, and the research reveals that the media highlighted the candidates' qualifications and the selection of vice-presidential candidates, pivotal aspects influencing the outcomes of Nigerian elections. The spotlight on issues such as insecurity and corruption underscores the importance of the media in addressing public concerns and holding government officials accountable.

These findings align with previous research on media framing, which argues that the media exerts a significant influence on setting the agenda and shaping public opinion leading up to elections (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). By prioritizing certain issues over others, the media can sway voter preferences and ultimately impact election results. The emphasis on candidate suitability and the choice of vice-presidential candidates in the 2023 Nigerian presidential election suggests that these factors played a crucial role in the electorate's decision-making process.

6.1 Media Framing and Candidate Suitability

The analysis revealed that "Candidate Suitability" emerged as the most prevalent frame in 27.14% of the reviewed articles. This finding aligns with previous scholarly work that underscores the media's role in shaping elections through its focus on candidates' traits, qualifications, and backgrounds. Notably, Druckman et al. (2018) argue that the media often highlights politicians' personal attributes and life experiences, influencing voter perceptions and electoral outcomes. Researchers like Ojebuyi and Salawu (2019) noted a tendency in Nigerian media to emphasize the personal characteristics of political candidates, particularly leading up to elections.

The two newspapers framed the degree of suitability of each candidate from the lens of supporters and opposition as well as from the opinions of columnists. The tone of this frame could be positive, as seen in *ThisDay*'s publication of February 15, 2023 titled "**2023: Atiku/Okowa Best Option to Transform Nigeria**," (Shittu, 2023) and another article on February 16, 2023 under the headline "**Tinubu Coming to Liberate Nigerians from Poverty, Insecurity**" (Sodeinde, 2023). Both articles typify the frames espousing each candidate's suitability in positive tones. Other similar frames are found in *The Nation* titled "**NNPP: We will lead by no less than 3m votes**" (*The Nation*, 2023), and *ThisDay*'s "**Osuntokun Hails Obi as Leader with Character, Capacity, Competence**" (Sodeinde, 2023).

The newspapers also framed narratives with a negative tone to paint the candidates in a poor light by casting doubt on their suitability for the job of president. For instance, *The Nation* reported that former Kaduna State governor in Nigeria's North West, Nasir El-Rufai described Labour Party candidate Peter Obi as a "Nollywood actor (reference to Nigeria's

film industry)” who had no chance of winning the election because his party’s campaign because was based on ethnicity and bigotry (Bassey, 2023). Tinubu also got his share of the negative framing when Najaatu Mohammed, a former member of the APC put a question mark on the candidate’s suitability by alleging that “***Tinubu Purchased APC Presidential Ticket By Bribing Party’s Governors***” (ThisDay, 2023). She claimed that “in their primary election, people were given ballot papers with Asiwaju (Tinubu) written on it. And we saw a clip in which governors were collecting money. It’s so shameful. What a disgrace! Governors collecting money; sharing money given to them by Asiwaju (Tinubu). I have been in politics for decades, but this is the first time that a presidential candidate will be sponsoring governors to support him. This is what is happening. Asiwaju is synonymous with money. For God’s sake, if all it takes is money, then what else will he do when he takes over power? It’s for him to retrieve his money.”

Lastly, there were also articles framed with a neutral tone, indicating a non-partisan standpoint. On election day, a report in *The Nation*, titled “***Presidential election: Who are the major gladiators?***” (Odufowokan, 2023) profiled the chances of all the leading candidates without expressly endorsing any of them.

This emphasis on specific candidates over party platforms or policy matters could have a significant impact on the democratic process. By predominantly centering the election discourse on Bola Tinubu's suitability and Obi’s bribery allegation, *The Nation* and *ThisDay* may have influenced public opinion by prioritizing individual credentials over broader political or socioeconomic considerations. However, this outcome diverges from previous research that highlights how the media often prioritizes subjects such as economic

performance, security, and corruption in emerging democracies over specific candidate traits. As illustrated by Adesoji (2010), past Nigerian elections saw a stronger focus on issues of corruption and governance within newspaper coverage. The increased emphasis on candidate suitability in the context of the 2023 elections may signal a shift in media priorities or mirror the unique political environment surrounding Tinubu's candidacy.

6.2 The Influence of Religion and Ethnicity on Media Framing

Religion and ethnicity emerged as crucial themes in 10.91% of media stories, aligning with prior studies on Nigerian elections that underscore the significance of these factors in voter conduct and political engagement (Ojo, 2018). Given Nigeria's diverse religious and ethnic composition, these identities frequently shape electoral dynamics by impacting voter preferences and candidate choices.

For instance, a *ThisDay* article published under the headline “***Apex Muslim Body, NSCIA, Releases Five-point Demand for Next Nigerian President***” reported that the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), the apex body overseeing the affairs of Muslims in Nigeria, released a five-point demand for the next president of Nigeria. The newspaper claimed that the 50-year organization advocated that Nigeria is still far from the expectations of its citizens and the global black community. The NSCIA “noted that it had become imperative to convey to presidential candidates and the electorate in the coming general election, its concerns and expectations to avoid past mistakes” (Addeh, 2023). Some of the demands centered on tackling insecurity concerns, improving epileptic power supply, advancing human capital empowerment, revitalizing education and inclusion, as well as

curbing endemic corruption. This underlines the influence of religion in Nigeria and how it could impact the choice of candidate during the elections.

As a manifestation of the ethnicization of Nigerian politics, *The Nation* reported on February 6, 2023 under the headline **“YCE Declares Support For Tinubu”** that the Yoruba Council of Elders (YCE), a socio-cultural group of Yoruba elders had endorsed the candidature of Tinubu who is of the Yoruba ethnic group. The newspaper reported that the Yoruba Council of Elders asserted that “the Yoruba, as a major stakeholder in the Nigeria enterprise, should not be pushed aside in the politics of the nation, noting that the phenomenon of foisting unprepared, weak and incompetent leaders on hapless Nigerians through the constant machinations of inveterate Yoruba ill-wishers will not be tolerated ever again. The Yoruba Council of Elders (YCE) declares its full support for Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu’s quest to become the next president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, because it is convinced that his track record as a former Governor of Lagos state, his detribalized disposition, his resourceful capacity to manage well and his love for humanity stand him in good stead to lift our country Nigeria from the precipice in which it has been dangling.” Each of the other major candidates also got the backing of their ethnic groups except for the Arewa Consultative Forum in the North, which could not agree on who to support between Atiku and Kwankwaso (Salako, 2023).

Conversely, the relatively fewer stories linking candidate qualifications to religion and ethnicity suggest a possible change in media focus. Earlier research, such as the work of Okoro & Oboh (2020), implied a heavier emphasis on these identities in past elections. This shift could indicate a response to the public's growing demand for issue-centric reporting or

signify that voters viewed the 2023 elections as more centered on the candidates' personalities and credentials rather than identity-based considerations.

6.3 Portrayal of Corruption and Insecurity

Harping on the corruption theme, *ThisDay* published, on January 24, 2023, under the headline “***Presidential Candidates and Burden of Corruption Allegations***” that: “The leading presidential candidates – Bola Tinubu of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Atiku Abubakar of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and Peter Obi of the Labour Party (LP) are all entangled in one corruption allegation or the other. What this means is that Nigerians are to make their choice at the polls among the leading presidential candidates in the next few weeks. Unlike in 2015, when the then opposition APC portrayed General Muhammadu Buhari as the untainted ‘Mr. Integrity’ who was out to save Nigeria, none of the leading presidential candidates in the forthcoming election could be easily described as untainted and incorruptible” (Akinwale, 2023).

This opening quote set the tone for the article, and emphasized that corruption allegations were a significant issue even before the elections. It suggests that the integrity of the candidates was already in question, which could undermine public trust in the electoral process.

The Nation also reported that Peter Obi of the Labour Party was enmeshed in a controversy after being alleged to have donated 2 billion Naira (\$4,395,604 by 2023 estimates) to the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). The newspaper, under the headline “***CAN Denies Receiving N2b Bribe from Peter Obi***” quoted the CAN President Archbishop Daniel Okoh as saying “To set the records straight, I am not aware of any N2bn given to Churches in Nigeria to mobilise votes for any 2023 presidential candidate and never

received the said petition dated December 22, 2022. Nigerians should note that CAN, as a faith-based entity, maintains its non-partisan stance and will not endorse or mobilise support for any candidate in the upcoming elections. CAN, therefore, urges members of the public to disregard the purported letter of petition as its content is not only untrue, but malicious. We warn those peddling the falsehood to desist from such acts because they are capable of defaming innocent people and revered religious institutions as well as breaching public peace” (Omokhunu, 2023).

The focus on corruption and insecurity, accounting for 15.05% and 14.75% of the narratives, aligns with existing research on media coverage of elections in developing countries. Numerous studies have underscored the significant impact of corruption and insecurity on public life and governance in Nigeria, highlighting them as pivotal themes in electoral discourse (Ibrahim & Ibeanu, 2009; Ogundiya, 2010). For instance, Chibuzor (2017) illustrates how Nigerian media typically frames elections around corruption, often portraying politicians through the lens of alleged dishonesty or involvement in unethical practices. Similarly, Adeyanju & Bello (2017) note that election coverage consistently features insecurity, particularly in regions plagued by violence and insurgencies. *ThisDay's* focus on highlighting and talking about corruption, which appeared in 64.7% of its coverage as opposed to 35.3% of *The Nation's*, suggests its concerns about government integrity. This aligns with research demonstrating how negative governance framing could affect public trust and attitudes toward political systems (Druckman, 2001), and *ThisDay's* focus on corruption as a top concern probably aimed to sway public opinion by linking particular politicians or political procedures to corrupt practices.

The insecurity frame was amply represented by several articles in *The Nation* such as “***IGP sets up planning, evaluation team for polls***” (Igbonwelundu, 2023), arising from security concerns about the election given the spate of incidents during the campaigns leading to election day. Headlines such as *ThisDay*’s “***Thugs Attack Obi Supporters in Lagos***” (James, 2023) and “***Why Police stopped Tinubu/Shettima campaign rally in Niger***” (Onogu, 2023) underline these security concerns with frequent clashes between supporters of rival parties as well as the general climate of unrest occasioned by the Boko Haram insurgents in the North East of the country.

The study's findings corroborate these observations, revealing that *The Nation* and *ThisDay* adhered to this thematic focus in their reporting on the 2023 election. According to the data, significant distinctions exist between *ThisDay* and *The Nation*'s coverage of corruption and insecurity in the 2023 Nigerian elections, highlighting how each publication frames and prioritizes these important issues. The data indicated that *ThisDay* placed a significant emphasis on corruption, with 33 incidents accounting for 64.7% of its overall coverage of this topic. In contrast, *The Nation* only mentions corruption in 18 cases, or 35.3% of its reporting. This difference implies that *ThisDay* might have purposefully highlighted corruption as a crucial political problem, perhaps as a result of its editorial stance or their readers' concerns about accountability and government. Framing, according to Entman (1993), is the process of picking out specific elements of a perceived reality and making them more prominent in order to further a specific narrative or goal.

Given that corruption and insecurity are enduring challenges in Nigeria with direct repercussions for the electorate, media attention to these issues likely mirrored public concerns. Moreover, by focusing electoral narratives on these issues, the media may have

facilitated a system of accountability by compelling political contenders to address these critical issues in their campaigns.

6.4 Economic Framing Discrepancy

Only 7.08% of the articles analyzed incorporated the economy as a framing factor, contrasting with previous studies emphasizing the importance of economic issues in election contexts. McCombs and Shaw (1972) argue that media focus on economic topics can significantly influence public sentiment and voting behavior, especially when voters prioritize economic performance. Okigbo and Eribo (2004) also observed that election reporting in Nigeria typically revolved around economic concerns like unemployment, inflation, and poverty, particularly in times of recession. Articles such as “*Fuel scarcity, currency swap and antics of enemies within*” (Oladesu, 2023); “*Palace intrigues*” (Abimbola, 2023); “*Headwinds on the homeward stretch*” (Tatalo, 2023); “*Presidency: Organized Private Sector Group Backs Peter Obi*” (*ThisDay*, 2023) and “*Nigeria’s next president, challenge of electricity and power supply*” (Nwangwu, 2023) all shaped the importance of the economy frame during the election coverage.

ThisDay reported economic issues more prominently, with 15 articles covering the economy, representing 62.5% of its economy coverage, compared to *The Nation*, which featured only 9 articles on the economy, making up 37.5% of its total on the same topic. This disparity suggests that *ThisDay* may see economic concerns as a central issue affecting Nigerian voters, aligning with findings that media outlets often prioritize certain frames based on their editorial direction or audience interests (Entman, 1993). Given that economic stability and growth are critical issues for Nigerian voters, *ThisDay*’s emphasis may reflect a

commitment to addressing these pressing concerns through their election coverage. The less frequent coverage of economic topics by *The Nation*, conversely, could indicate an editorial focus on issues deemed more immediate or emotionally resonant, such as insecurity, which received higher coverage in the newspaper's reports

The relatively limited attention given to the economy in 2023 election coverage could suggest that the media deemed other subjects—such as candidate suitability and religious/ethnic factors—as more pressing or noteworthy. Alternatively, it might reflect a broader skepticism in the political system's capacity to address economic challenges, prompting the media to shift focus away from these issues.

Examining the discrepancy also prompts inquiries into how the media shapes the public agenda. Minimizing coverage of economic issues by the media might lead to diminished public demand for candidates to outline specific economic strategies, potentially impacting the quality of democratic discussions. As highlighted by Entman (1993), how the media presents topics not only influences public opinion but also molds how individuals perceive those issues.

6.5 Influence of Tinubu's ownership of *The Nation* newspaper on election coverage

Bola Ahmed Tinubu, well-known Nigerian politician and businessman, is the owner of *The Nation* newspaper, even if he did not hold an executive position. His connection to this influential paper helped shape how the 2023 presidential election was covered. In the end, Tinubu won the election. According to McChesney (2008), the media do sway election results and *The Nation* was a key tool for Tinubu, helping build his image and managing how people perceive his presidential run. *The Nation* often framed Tinubu in a good light.

They highlighted his work as a businessman, charity supporter, and a past Lagos State governor. The newspaper focused on his successes in Lagos, such as economic changes and infrastructure projects. They did not talk much about his flaws. This lines up with research showing that media owned by political figures often shapes stories to make them look better.

Tinubu was often seen as a leader who could unite people despite concerns about his choice of Kashim Shettima as his running mate since they were both Muslims. Other media outlets raised flags about a Muslim-Muslim ticket. However, *The Nation* framed it as a wise choice. The newspaper talked more about Shettima's skills than the religious aspects of the ticket.

The Nation also practiced selective reporting. The newspaper tended to ignore or downplay any negative news about Tinubu while amplifying his rivals' weaknesses. For example, the accusation of certificate forgery got much attention from other media, but *The Nation* chose not to focus on it. Instead, they shifted attention to other positive stories about Tinubu's experience and political acumen. *The Nation* neither covered the big interview with Najaatu Mohammed, a former APC member, who claimed Tinubu bought his party nomination nor did it do a followup on the viral expose. Observers have noted that media controlled by political figures often skip reporting on negative information to protect their interests. This example shows how ownership can affect what gets reported during elections.

The Nation was not just about controlling the stories; it also boosted Tinubu's campaign messages. Studies show that how often and prominently a candidate is covered can shape how voters see them. During the campaign, *The Nation* provided extensive coverage of Tinubu's rallies, policies, and public appearances, helping ensure that his

messages reached many voters. When Tinubu spoke about economic reforms and security, *The Nation* often put those stories on the front page. This regular coverage helped build a positive view of his plans, making voters feel more confident in him. That likely played a part in his win.

Looking at how *The Nation* covered the election compared to other outlets shows apparent differences. Other media, like *ThisDay* as well Premium Times and Arise News, looked into Tinubu's background and alleged legal issues. However, *The Nation* always focused on his positive qualities and attacked competitors like Atiku Abubakar and Peter Obi. When accusations came out about Atiku's corruption during his time as Vice President, *The Nation* ran several stories about it. However, they did not apply the same level of scrutiny to Tinubu's alleged financial problems, which clearly showed a tilt in their reporting.

Tinubu's link to *The Nation* newspaper shows how the media can be used for political gain in elections. By shaping stories, amplifying campaign points, and downplaying controversies, *The Nation* helped build Tinubu's public image. This reinforces what we know about how media ownership can influence voters and public opinions.

6.6 Comparative analysis with other elections

We can gain a better understanding of media framing techniques by contrasting the results of this study with those from earlier elections. For example, because of the Boko Haram insurgency, media coverage of the 2011 and 2015 elections was mostly focused on security concerns (Adibe, 2015). On the other hand, the elections of 2023 witnessed a more impartial presentation of various topics, indicating a possible expansion of the media's scope.

This more inclusive framing is consistent with developments seen in other democracies, where media attention has shifted from a narrow focus on issues to a more comprehensive storyline (Iyengar & Kinder, 2010). For instance, election coverage in the United States has expanded to cover a larger range of topics, including social justice, immigration, and healthcare, from its previous emphasis on the candidates' backgrounds and the state of the economy (Jamieson & Capella, 2008). The study's conclusions suggest the Nigerian media might be on a similar path, although with a more varied approach to the framing of political concerns.

This more inclusive framing, meanwhile, also departs from certain African contexts where media attention is still mostly concentrated on a small number of topics. For instance, Moyo (2011) discovered that political repression and violence have dominated Zimbabwean media coverage of elections, with little focus on social or economic concerns. The Nigerian media's comparatively fair framing may be a sign of a more developed media landscape where a variety of problems are given careful thought.

Election coverage during elections tends to shift based on the political landscape, often swinging between focusing on important issues and the personalities of the candidates. For instance, in Nigeria and South Africa, the media tends to spotlight individual candidates rather than delve into their policies. Looking at the 2024 South African elections, it's clear that the media coverage didn't really engage with what the political parties were saying. Instead, it centered on the candidates themselves and overlooked policy discussions (Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa, 2024). A similar trend is visible in Nigerian media, where reports usually center on the personal lives and scandals of

candidates, driven by factors like media ownership and political ties. This approach might lead voters to be swayed by charisma instead of policies.

On the flip side, in the United States, while personality matters in politics (WEKU, 2024), there's also a focus on policy issues in the lead-up to elections. Still, the tendency to cover the competitive aspects of the election can sometimes drown out those important discussions on policy. This mix is shaped by things like media bias and the business side of news coverage.

So, the way elections are covered varies across different political systems, influenced by media practices, ownership, and political contexts. Although stories about candidates can grab people's attention, too much focus on personalities might stop voters from making well-informed choices.

6.7 Theoretical Implications

The findings align with established theories of media framing, particularly those by Entman (1993), who argue that media frames define issues, investigate underlying causes, pass moral judgments, and propose solutions. In the context of the 2023 Nigerian elections, media organizations prioritized a candidate's character and leadership qualities over issues such as corruption and the country's economic state. It appears that the media framed the election as a referendum on individual leadership capabilities rather than on crucial political issues, as indicated by their focus on candidates rather than policies.

This observation reinforces the framing theory, which suggests that the media can influence public opinion by presenting selective truths. By highlighting candidates' leadership potential as key talking points, sometimes overshadowing discussions on

corruption, insecurity, and economic challenges, the media likely shaped how the electorate perceived the election. Furthermore, the emphasis on vice-presidential candidates (20.35%) underscored the importance of political alliances, implying that media narratives emphasizing the implications of selecting a running mate influenced voters' decision-making processes.

Moreover, the results lend support to the agenda-setting theory, which posits that the media can mold public opinion by determining which issues receive coverage. The limited coverage of economic news (7.08%) implies that economic matters did not command significant attention in public discussions. This aligns with the argument proposed by McCombs and Shaw (1972) that media exposure can lead individuals to perceive certain topics as more salient than others. Consequently, voters may not have considered the economy a predominant issue when making their electoral choices, despite its importance in the country's political landscape.

6.8 Practical Implications

The research outcomes offer valuable insights into how media molds public opinion leading up to elections and, in turn, impacts political campaign strategies. Media platforms have the power to steer public attention towards personality-centric politics, evident in the focus on a candidate's suitability rather than specific policy issues. Candidates may have capitalized on this narrative by highlighting personal qualities over presenting in-depth policy proposals.

In developing campaign messaging, political campaign teams and stakeholders must acknowledge the impact of media framing. A more balanced approach, combining

discussions on policy matters with showcasing personal leadership characteristics, could prove beneficial in upcoming political contests. Additionally, significant public discourse on vice presidential candidates suggests that campaign planners should place more emphasis on selecting a running mate and the accompanying public engagement efforts.

6.9 Implications on democratic processes

The findings of the study significantly influence the role of media in Nigeria's political processes. The media have played a crucial role in shaping public perception of key issues during the 2023 elections by highlighting candidate suitability, corruption, and security concerns. Given that media coverage can guide voters on important factors for their political decisions, this framing may have impacted both the electorate's priorities and candidates' strategies (Weaver, 2007).

The relatively low emphasis on economic issues by the media may lead to a disconnect between public concerns and media coverage, potentially hindering the media's role in fostering informed democratic dialogue. In modern democracies, the media's ability to set the agenda is paramount, as argued by Castells (2009); however, this authority must be wielded responsibly to ensure comprehensive coverage of all relevant topics.

Moreover, the findings of the research underscore the enduring importance of ethnicity and religion in Nigerian politics, despite clear indications that the country is moving towards policy-focused coverage. This suggests that while Nigeria's media landscape is evolving, its complex social and cultural elements exert a significant influence. The future trajectory of Nigerian democracy will profoundly shape the media's capacity to either uphold or challenge these dynamics.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

This chapter summarizes the research findings and offers insights into how content framing impacts public perceptions from theoretical, methodological, and practical perspectives. It also highlights critical findings, research challenges, and the theoretical and practical implications to enhance comprehension of media ownership, content framing, and democratic processes.

7.1 Overview of findings and discussion

The findings section examined how *The Nation* and *ThisDay* covered Nigeria's 2023 presidential election. It shows important insights about how the media shapes public opinion, particularly during elections. With 53.69%, *ThisDay* had more coverage than *The Nation*, with 46.31%. Both papers focused more on news presentations than opinions, but *The Nation* had more interpretive pieces than *ThisDay*. Candidate suitability, which interrogated the electability of the candidates, particularly Bola Tinubu of the APC, was the dominant frame with 27.14% of the coverage. Corruption (15.05%) and insecurity (14.75%) were also significant. The coverage mainly spotlighted Tinubu and Atiku Abubakar, while Peter Obi and Rabiun Kwankwaso got much less attention, suggesting some biases in the reporting. These results align with media framing and agenda-setting theories and show how selective coverage can influence what people think and what is important to voters. The study highlights the need for fair and issue-centered journalism to boost democratic involvement and transparent election processes.

The discussion section deals with how *The Nation* and *ThisDay* covered Nigeria's 2023 presidential elections. It discusses how both newspapers aimed for fair reporting and

how the coverage shaped how people viewed the candidates. The newspapers focused on who was fit for the job, choices for vice president, and significant issues like corruption and safety, and this reflects how they influence what voters think and what they prioritize. Interestingly, religion and ethnicity were mentioned less than in previous elections. This suggests that the coverage centered more on the candidates and that economic issues did not get much attention either. This showed the newspapers' priorities or how the public feels about those topics. The study also points out that the media framed issues more broadly and inclusively than before, broadly hinting at development in how news is delivered.

The results and discussion sections emphasize the role that the media plays in forming democracy, directing the interests of voters, and emphasizing the necessity of impartial coverage to keep the public informed about politics. The 2023 Nigerian presidential election not only acted as a litmus test for the country's democratic structures but also exemplified the role of media framing in shaping public sentiment during a significant political epoch. This study delved into themes such as corruption, insecurity, ethnicity, religion, and candidate suitability while examining how media framing influences voter behavior through a content analysis of reputable Nigerian newspapers. The findings underscore how media framing, by accentuating specific issues, portraying candidates' strengths and weaknesses, and interpreting the election through different perspectives, crucially molds public opinion which, in the 2023 elections, there were more opinion pieces (16.5%) in *The Nation* than in *ThisDay* (9.4%). This strategy aligns with research showing that opinion sections can influence voters' understanding by offering complex perspectives that may differ from news items' direct presentation (Druckman, 2001).

To recap, the study's Research Questions were:

- i. How did *The Nation* and *Thisday* newspapers frame the major presidential candidates during the 2023 Nigerian elections, and what were the dominant frames used?
- ii. To what extent did *The Nation* and *ThisDay* newspapers prioritize the dominant frames and candidate attributes in their coverage of the 2023 Nigerian presidential election?
- iii. What differences can be observed in the framing strategies employed by *The Nation* and *Thisday* Newspapers in their portrayal of presidential candidates?
- iv. How did the frequency and prominence of coverage of specific candidates by *The Nation* and *ThisDay* newspapers shape the presentation of these candidates during the 2023 Nigerian elections, and what potential implications might this have for public perception?
- v. In what ways did Tinubu's ownership of *The Nation* influence the newspaper's coverage of the 2023 Nigerian elections?

7.2 Answering the Research Questions

To answer the first research question, viz how did *The Nation* and *Thisday* newspapers frame the major presidential candidates during the 2023 Nigerian elections, and what the dominant frames used were, the study found that 'Candidate Suitability' was the dominant frame in both newspapers, making up 27.14% of all election-related news. But how the candidates were presented differed based on each newspaper's editorial stance. *The Nation* talked positively about Bola Tinubu of the APC by highlighting his leadership and political experience. The newspaper also reinforced his credibility by reiterating his endorsement by different socio-political groups e.g, "*N'Delta agitators endorse Tinubu, say he will make a good President.*" (Edremoda, 2023). On the other hand, *ThisDay* was

tougher on Tinubu as they published stories that questioned his honesty and credibility. They covered allegations of bribery in the APC primaries and raised doubts about his academic background.

Atiku Abubakar of the PDP got mixed portrayals as *ThisDay* framed him positively as a skilled leader with experience, but *The Nation* had stories that questioned his credibility and criticized his time as Vice President of the country between 1999 and 2007. Labour Party's Peter Obi did not get as much attention as Tinubu and Atiku although *ThisDay* was more positive about him, presenting him as a fresh option with strong grassroots support.

Other important frames included:

- Corruption (15.05%): *ThisDay* focused heavily on corruption claims against candidates, especially Tinubu, while *The Nation* highlighted corruption issues within the PDP.
- Insecurity (14.75%): Both papers looked at the candidates' plans for security and *The Nation* profiled Tinubu as someone who could tackle insecurity while *ThisDay* questioned the ruling APC's failures in this area.
- Religion/Ethnicity (10.91%): This topic was big due to the debate over Tinubu's choice of a fellow Muslim as a running mate. *The Nation* defended his pick, but *ThisDay* maintained that it could create more religious tension in the country.

In advancing a response for the second research question, the study finds both newspapers 'guilty' of focusing more on personality-based coverage rather than any quality policy discussions (Ajibulu, 2023). Candidate suitability was prioritized over economic or governance issues, shaping public perception in a way that focused on individual leadership rather than concrete policy plans. *The Nation* prioritized Tinubu's campaign events, endorsements, and political maneuvers, giving less attention to potential controversies.

ThisDay prioritized accountability and scrutiny, covering opposition criticisms, corruption allegations, and policy debates in greater detail. By framing the election as a contest of personalities rather than ideas, both newspapers influenced public perception by emphasizing leadership qualities and party loyalty over substantive discussions on economic reform, security strategies, and governance policies (Oboh, 2014).

The third research question interrogated the differences in the strategies employed by both *The Nation* and *ThisDay* to portray the leading presidential candidates and how the differences may have shaped public opinion about the candidates. The study analysed the primary differences in the framing strategies and tabulates the findings below:

Table 7: Differences in framing strategies

	<i>The Nation</i> (Pro-Tinubu)	<i>ThisDay</i> (Critical of Tinubu)
Coverage Tone	Mostly positive for Tinubu, critical of opposition candidates.	More balanced, scrutinized all major candidates.
Focus	Tinubu’s competence, endorsements, and campaign successes.	Accountability, corruption, governance failures.
Negative Framing	Focused on Atiku’s past controversies and PDP’s corruption history.	Focused on Tinubu’s integrity issues, APC’s governance record.
Religion/Ethnicity	Downplayed the Muslim-Muslim ticket controversy.	Criticized Tinubu’s decision as divisive.

Source: Researcher (2025)

The information above reveals that these differences in framing may have shaped public opinion in the following ways:

- Readers of *The Nation* were possibly more likely to view Tinubu as the most competent candidate, given the newspaper’s emphasis on his endorsements, political strategies, and experience.
- Readers of *ThisDay* were more exposed to Tinubu’s controversies, potentially fostering skepticism about his integrity and governance style.

To answer the fourth research question, the study found that the perception of the public about each of the candidates is directly proportional to the frequency and prominence of coverage enjoyed by the candidates. This is also reflected in the total number of votes each candidate obtained at the polls which Tinubu won. According to the study’s frequency analysis, Tinubu received the highest number of mentions in both newspapers, even though the tone and framing were different as shown in the table below:

Table 8: Frequency Analysis of Mentions

Candidate	Mentions in <i>The Nation</i>	Mentions in <i>ThisDay</i>
Tinubu (APC)	46 (News), 7 (Columns), 15 (Politics)	43 (News), 4 (Columns), 13 (Politics)
Atiku (PDP)	18 (News), 6 (Politics)	37 (News), 8 (Politics)
Obi (LP)	18 (News) 6 (Politics)	17 (News), 4 (Politics)
Kwankwaso (NNPP)	6 (News) 1 (Politics)	6 (News), 2 (Politics)

Source: Researcher 2025

Tinubu dominated coverage in *The Nation*, reinforcing his visibility and credibility while Atiku received more balanced attention in *ThisDay*, suggesting a less overt bias compared to *The Nation*. Peter Obi and Rabiu Kwankwaso were underrepresented in both newspapers, which may have affected their perceived viability as contenders.

Therefore, the high frequency of Tinubu's mentions, especially positive framing in *The Nation*, may have contributed to shaping public perception by reaffirming his visibility and electability among APC supporters and, likely guaranteed his victory.

Finally, in response to the fifth research question, Tinubu's ownership of *The Nation* may have played a role in framing his candidacy positively, minimizing negative press, and setting the agenda for political discourse. This aligns with the propaganda model (Herman & Chomsky, 1988), which suggests that media ownership influences editorial policies. By ensuring high visibility, positive framing, and selective reporting, the newspaper became an essential tool in shaping public opinion in Tinubu's favor, perhaps contributing significantly to his electoral victory.

The analysis demonstrates that media framing played a crucial role in shaping public perception during the 2023 elections. *The Nation's* pro-Tinubu bias and *ThisDay's* more balanced but scrutinizing stance may have influenced voter attitudes by either reinforcing a positive narrative for Tinubu or highlighting critical issues about his candidacy. These findings emphasize the impact of media ownership, editorial bias, and agenda-setting in Nigerian electoral politics.

7.3 Recommendations

This section presents implementable strategies to address the identified challenges and foster positive transformations in the media sphere based on the study's discoveries, particularly concerning the media's impact on election-related content during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. Subsequently, this study highlights several crucial concerns that scholars, policymakers, and media professionals need to take into account. A sequence of

recommendations is extracted from the analysis discussed in the preceding chapters and is substantiated by the data presented in Tables 1, 2, and 3. These recommendations aim to enhance the quality of media reporting, enhance public engagement with political issues, and promote responsible journalism as the next presidential election approaches in 2027.

The following are detailed recommendations grounded in the findings of this research:

i. Diversifying media coverage across multiple platforms

The results from Table 1 reveal that *The Nation* and *ThisDay*, which constituted 46.31% and 53.69% of the total coverage in the study, respectively, were the primary sources of content. Despite the substantial readership of these two newspapers, it is crucial to acknowledge Nigeria's extensive media landscape, encompassing various outlets offering diverse perspectives on politics, economics, and society. To present a more comprehensive depiction of the media landscape during elections, media entities and future researchers should endeavor to integrate a broader array of media platforms—both digital and traditional.

Moreover, a comprehensive understanding of how different segments of Nigerian society are exposed to election-related content can be achieved by integrating online news platforms, social media channels, television broadcasts, and radio shows. With the emergence and growing popularity of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter), a wider audience—particularly young individuals—now has access to election news and can engage in political discussions.

ii. Promoting issue-based reporting

According to Table 2, news articles accounted for 68.74% of election-related content, followed by opinions and editorials at 12.69% and political segments at 17.10%. This data suggests that while there was significant coverage of breaking news, there remains an opportunity for further exploration and debate on key issues, especially within opinion pieces and editorial sections.

The dominant frames depicted in Table 3—such as candidate suitability (27.14%), selection of vice-presidential candidates (20.35%), and issues related to corruption (15.05%)—reveal that media coverage largely focused on personality-driven narratives. Despite the importance of these narratives, they often overshadow critical policy topics, such as the economy, which constituted only 7.08% of all news frames. Nigerian media platforms should prioritize issue-based reporting that delves into crucial subjects like economic reforms, security measures, and governance, as these directly affect the well-being of the population, fostering a more educated electorate.

Media outlets should adopt a more neutral stance by emphasizing policy dialogues and the proposals presented by candidates, rather than overly emphasizing personal attributes or political strategies. This approach will empower voters to make well-informed decisions based on the candidates' strategies for addressing Nigeria's challenges.

iii Encouraging investigative journalism and in-depth reporting

As Table 3 indicates, corruption was the central focus in 15.05% of the news stories. However, a considerable amount of this coverage centered on surface-level allegations and counter-accusations among political figures. Therefore, media entities should invest in

investigative journalism to delve deeper into uncovering the root causes of corruption, the mechanisms supporting it, and potential solutions.

Investigative journalism plays a crucial role in holding political leaders accountable and enhancing public awareness of systemic issues. The significance of investigative journalism cannot be overstated in upholding the democratic system's checks and balances, ensuring that election campaigns address genuine national challenges rather than distractions and character attacks. News organizations need to empower their journalists with the necessary tools and guidance to conduct thorough examinations of key election-related subjects.

iv. Addressing media ownership and biases

Another vital aspect to consider is the issue of media ownership and its influence on the framing of news stories. In Nigeria, the ownership of media channels often dictates the perspective and bias of political reporting, leading to biased coverage that might sway public perceptions in ways that do not accurately reflect reality. Even in cases where ownership is linked to political interests, media firms should strive for enhanced editorial autonomy.

v. Enhancing media literacy among the public

Enhancing media literacy among the Nigerian public is crucial in combating biased or deceptive media coverage. The outcomes of this research demonstrate that public perceptions are significantly influenced by how the media portrays election-related matters. Conversely, a populace well-versed in media literacy will possess the skills necessary for critical examination, bias identification, and the formulation of well-founded conclusions.

Collaboration is essential among government entities like the National Orientation Agency (NOA), non-governmental organizations such as YIAGA Africa (a nonprofit civic organization dedicated to fostering democratic governance), and academic institutions to bolster initiatives promoting media literacy. Such programs should educate individuals on how to engage critically with media sources, enabling them to recognize biases, discern common framing techniques, and distinguish factual news from opinion pieces. Particularly during elections, when political stakes run high and the public is bombarded with information from diverse sources — including social media, notorious for disseminating fake news rapidly and potentially causing lasting harm — the importance of media literacy education cannot be overstated.

vi. Strengthening of Ethical Journalism Standards

To elevate ethical standards in Nigerian journalism, journalists must adhere to principles of fairness, balance, and objectivity when reporting on elections. Particularly crucial is the avoidance of biased or subjective framing which has the potential to deceive voters and influence election outcomes in ways that may not align with the genuine intent of the electorate.

Journalists need to undergo continuous training in ethical reporting practices provided by the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) and other relevant institutions, especially during periods of elections. Furthermore, news organizations should establish internal editorial guidelines that prioritize objectivity in election reporting and outline protocols for rectifying errors or biases in their content.

7.4 Limitations of the Study

While this study has provided valuable insights into how media framing influences public opinion during the Nigerian presidential election of 2023, it is essential to acknowledge certain limitations. These constraints, though not invalidating the results, pinpoint areas that require further strengthening or exploration in future studies.

The primary limitations revolve around sample size, the range of media outlets studied, the temporal focus of the analysis, and methodological constraints associated with content analysis. Each of these aspects is examined in depth below:

i. Limited sample of newspapers

This study's reliance on data exclusively from two newspapers—*The Nation* and *ThisDay*—represents one of its biggest limitations. Despite the significant presence and influence of these newspapers within Nigeria's media landscape, they may not provide a fully representative portrayal of the diverse media narratives in the country. As indicated in Table 1, *ThisDay* accounted for 53.69% of the articles analyzed, with *The Nation* making up the remaining 46.31%. While their selection was influenced by availability and reach during the study period, notable publications such as *Punch*, *Vanguard*, and *The Guardian* were omitted from the analysis. This exclusion restricts the generalizability of the study's conclusions to the broader Nigerian media environment.

Furthermore, the study's scope does not encompass electronic media platforms, including radio, television, and online news sources. These platforms play a crucial role in shaping public opinion, especially in a country like Nigeria where internet access and social

media usage are rapidly growing. Focusing solely on print media may have provided an incomplete view of how different media outlets frame election-related issues. To obtain a more comprehensive understanding of media framing across diverse channels, future research should consider including a wider array of print, television, and digital media platforms in their analysis.

ii. **Focus and nature of the Study**

Another limitation to be noted is the temporal focus of the investigation. The research was conducted within a specific time-frame preceding the 2023 presidential election. This means that long-term patterns and changes in the media narrative that might have happened before or after the election may not be included in the study, which only documents a snapshot of media framing during this period. Since media framing frequently changes and adapts to political happenings, it's possible that important frames that gained traction early or late in the campaign were overlooked in this analysis.

iii. **Potential bias in story selections**

Yet another limitation is the propensity to be biased when selecting stories for analysis and this could be due to several reasons. Since the research was based on the 339 articles published during the period of analysis, any of the sample materials could have been influenced by the personal bias of the editorial team. Some issues and politicians may either have been over-emphasized or marginalized, as well, due to the bias of a media that has become increasingly politically stratified. For instance, buyouts of the strategic frames such as corruption or race/religion in any major election are likely going to depend on contrasting editorial perspectives of *The Nation* and *ThisDay* on important electoral issues. Despite the

research's objective analysis goal, the outcomes might have been impacted by the media outlets' innate biases. Future studies might overcome this sampling constraint by including outlets from either alternative ownership structures, or with different political orientations. These biases may be reduced by techniques like triangulation, in which findings are compared against one another using other sources to check reliability.

Future study could address this problem by utilizing a more diverse sample of media outlets, such as ones with varying ownership structures or political affiliations. Furthermore, using methods like triangulation—comparing results from several sources—could lessen the effect of bias from a single media outlet on the final conclusions.

iv. Public perception data drawback

Another problem is interpreting public opinion by the media content available. Although media framing analysis can tell us how issues were framed, we do not know whether the public is even aware of these frames or if these matters are capable of influencing voting behavior. In-depth focus groups, voter surveys and other data will be required to determine the impact of media framing on public sentiment.

These limitations offer avenues for future research to build up this study — by expanding into a larger variety of media sources, conducting longitudinal analyses, and utilizing mixed methods techniques to investigate the intricacies of media framing more broadly. While the results are subject to these limitations, nevertheless this study provides a valuable first look at the relationship between politics, media and public opinion in Nigeria.

7.5 Future research areas

Future research can be conducted in a number of areas based on the study's recommendations. These prospective areas of study will improve our comprehension of how the media shapes public opinion, particularly during election seasons. The following list of probable study topics is backed up by references to pertinent literature:

1. Examining how online forums influence public opinion during elections: Given the popularity of social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter (now X), it's critical to comprehend how these platforms present election-related content in contrast to more conventional media sources (Tandoc Jr & Johnson, 2016).
2. Examining how well issue-based reporting might increase voters' electoral literacy: Although media coverage is dominated by storylines driven by personalities, a focus on policy discussions may empower voters. Studies could examine how media outlets can balance political narratives and how issue-based framing affects voter decision-making.
3. Assessing how investigative journalism affects public confidence in the political process: According to Fishman (1980), investigative journalism can reveal more in-depth information about systemic problems like corruption. As a result, future studies will look into how well investigative articles influence voters' opinions about candidates and electoral integrity.
4. Examining the impact of media ownership on electoral coverage and the portrayal of political ideologies: Studies could examine how media ownership affects public perception and the framing of election-related news, with a particular emphasis on media organizations connected to corporate or political interests (Noam, 2009).
5. Evaluating how well media literacy programs work to counteract bias and disinformation during elections: Because misinformation is so common on digital platforms, studies could

concentrate on how media literacy programs can assist the public in critically assessing media content, especially during the crucial election season (Mihailidis & Viotty, 2017; Hobbs, 2010).

6. Examining the connection between public trust in the media and ethical journalism practices during elections: Studies could look at how upholding ethical standards in journalism affects both public trust in the electoral process (Ward, 2010) and the accuracy and fairness of media coverage (Deuze, 2005).

Future studies in these fields may have a major impact on enhancing Nigeria's election-related media coverage, promoting better political engagement, and fortifying the democratic process. These would also provide insightful information about how media framing might help or hurt voters' capacity to make wise decisions.

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