



SOCIAL MEDIA NARRATIVES AND POLICY-SPECIFIC VOTING: AGRICULTURAL REFORM IN NIGERIAN ELECTIONS

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KeyWords

Social media stories, specific voting, policy-based voting, agricultural reform, Nigerian elections, voter behaviour, political communication.

ABSTRACT

The paper evaluates the interaction between social media discourse, views of agricultural reform, and policy-specific voting in the electoral process in Nigeria. Based on the secondary data of the Afrobarometer Round 9 survey, the study examines the use of social media content exposure to inform voter perception of agricultural policies and also influence electoral behaviour. The discussion is based on the Spatial Theory of Voting, Agenda-Setting Theory, Framing Theory, and Uses and Gratifications Theory, which are all aimed at explaining the way in which voters process political information and decide to vote.

The results show that the social media stories are strongly positively correlated with voter opinion on agricultural reform, with a correlation coefficient of 0.77. This suggests that the greater the exposure to social media content, the stronger and clearer the positions can be that are held regarding agricultural policies. Social media can be used to make complex policy matters easier to understand and present them in formats accessible to voters, thus defining the way in which voters perceive governmental performance and reform agenda. Nevertheless, the research results also indicate that social media accounts have a limited direct effect on policy-specific voting. The results of the regression exercises suggest that the social media accounts account for only a modest percentage of the difference in voting behaviour, and this further underlines the fact that other factors like ethnic identity, party affiliation, and past performance of the government still influence voting behaviour.

Although this individual effect is weak, chi-square analysis shows that there is a strong and significant correlation between exposure to social media and support of candidates who advocate agricultural reform. This implies that social media discourse leads to greater trends of political congruency and group-level support, inclusive of individual vote selection. The research finds that the impact of social media on political perception and trends in group voting cannot be overlooked, although the impact of social media on individual voting behaviour is insignificant.

The paper emphasizes the increased significance of digital communications in Nigerian elections and demands better policy communication, education of the voters, and additional study of the relations between social media and electoral behaviour.

INTRODUCTION

Policy specific voting is a critical tool in the democratic election process, in which voters use their votes to match their preferences in terms of policy with the stances taken by the candidates or parties (Guntermann, 2023). This strategy preempts policy decisions over the long term, instead of the party loyalty, character, and ideology commitment of the candidate. Voters review the policy options of rivalry and vote in favour of the candidate whose policies reflect their preferences the most, thus reflecting the democratic ideas of citizens who are able to evaluate the policy options and hold the leaders responsible through the electoral process. Policy-specific voting is a concept that is based on spatial theories of electoral competition. These theoretical approaches formulate preferences about politics in the conceptual form of a multidimensional policy space, in which voters and political actors hold different opinions on diverse issues. The proximity models assume that voters support the candidate whose policy vector is closest to their desired one, but directional models stress the direction of policy positions, not the exact proximity. As a result, voters can back up candidates who are highly advocating policies in the direction that they desire, even when the stance of the candidate does not exactly match that of the voters (Tiemann, 2022). Recent research indicates that voters might combine distance and polarity factors and assess the proximity of policy positions as well as the vigour with which the candidates advocate certain policies.

Studies single out a number of conditions that affect policy-specific voting. The salience of issues is one of them: once a policy problem reaches a high level of visibility in the media or it affects the lives of citizens directly, voters are much more likely to include it in their electoral intentions (Walgrave et al., 2020). The availability of information is also a critical factor; voters have a clear picture of the party standings, and therefore they are in a better position to make comparisons between policy options and vote accordingly. Where this information is not readily available, voters can still use alternative heuristics, that is, party labels or judgments about party leaders.

Political sophistication also controls the ability of voters to vote based on policy-specific voting. People who have advanced education or are more interested in politics are usually placed in a better position of understanding the policy-making processes and find a basis between their needs and desires and the decisions and actions by the political actors. The relevance of issue voting is also determined by contextual political factors. In political parties where the lines between parties are drawn on major issues, voters find it easier to make distinction among choices. On the other hand, parties that hold similar policy views or where allegiance to a party takes precedence over that of the party produce less policy-related voting (Guntermann & Persson, 2023).

Democratic representation is inextricably connected to policy-specific voting. The policy positions that the voters are rewarding or punishing the political actors will give the elected officials stronger incentives to implement the policies that reflect the preferences of the population, thus bridging the gap between citizens and the governmental institutions (Guntermann & Persson, 2023). However, this cause and effect is not automatic as the clearness of political responsibility and electoral regulations, which are institutional arrangements, influence whether the preferences of the voters will be translated into the outcomes of the policies. This process has also been influenced by technological changes; with the aid of digital tools, including voting-advice applications, voters are now able to compare their policy preferences with party stands on a continuum of issues and can potentially be positively influenced to vote on issues (Monzel, 2025). Although it is theoretically important, policy specific voting is faced with a number of limitations. A large number of voters do not have detailed information about the parties on issues that are not salient. In such a case, they can make use of more simplified cues, including party or governmental performance. Retrospective voting may also be done where the voters base their judgement on the political actors based on the results of past policies instead of future proposals. However, when policy matters are highly salient and party stances are widely known, policy-specific voting can be a highly salient channel of citizen control over political performance.

The emergence of social media has significantly transformed the flow of political information. The social media narratives can be described as the stories and interpretations created and shared by people and organisations using digital platforms, including Twitter (now called X), Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok (Georgakopoulou, 2022). Such stories systematize the knowledge of political happenings and social problems into the forms of narratives that influence the understanding of the population. Unlike the traditional media narratives, which usually follow linear formats, the social media narratives often occur in fragmented, interactive compositions that combine text, imagery, videos, hashtags, and user comments.

The construction by a group of people is one of the characteristics of social media narratives. Telling stories has a way of developing by involving many users, and not one user who is narrating. They bring personal experiences

and meanings that merge into larger digital network narratives. Dawson and Makela (2020) refer to such contributions as micro-stories that preempt daily experiences and instant responses. These are individual contributions that grow in size and become bigger stories that get shared, commented on, and reposted through such processes and become a part of the large communities of the internet. The social media stories are also a part of identity and group attachment. Online sources provide platforms on which people post their experiences and group identity, and are exposed to communities that have similar cultural or social backgrounds. In most instances, Diasporic communities use social media to maintain cultural identity and collective memory regardless of geographic distance (Kianpour et al., 2026).

The discourse of these stories is often used in political issues to interpret policy issues. Political actors, followers, and organised groups create political narratives that highlight specific interpretations of events and disregard other views. These stories can portray a negative image of opponents or strengthen the group identities of supporters (Reddi et al., 2021). The processes are further enhanced by the digital platform algorithms, which encourage content that generates high engagement and thus enable stories that are emotionally charged to become widely circulated in a network. This high rate of diffusion of narratives has been theorised as narrative contagion, which involves the proliferation of widely shared narratives triggering the creation of subsequent content that stimulates the expansion of the narrative (Zhao et al., 2026). Although such a process may contribute to the increased awareness of political matters among people, it may also lead to the strengthening of ideological polarisation. The information that users constantly face confirms their already formed opinion in online circles, which restricts them in their contact with a different viewpoint. False information and disinformation can also spread using such accounts especially where emotionally charged accounts present misdirected conversations of events. Findings based on empirical studies have shown that stories with a high emotional appeal or sensationalistic gain more attention and sharing (Hamby et al., 2024; Stubbing et al., 2025).

Agricultural reform is an important area of policy in the politics of the electoral process in Nigeria, as agriculture is the main focus of the national economy and rural life. A large proportion of the population relies on agriculture as a source of income and jobs. However, the industry faces the endemic vulnerability to low productivity, lack of infrastructure, and inability to access credit and exposure to climate shocks (Balana & Oyeyemi, 2022). Therefore, the political actors often promise agricultural reform policy in their electoral campaigns as part of a larger agenda to boost food security and rural development (Resnick, 2024). After Nigeria was transferred to civilian rule in 1999, election contests in Nigeria have consistently involved agricultural development promises. Under the administration of Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2007), there was a National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy that involved agricultural programs meant to reduce poverty and trigger rural development.

However, a significant number of these initiatives faced the implementation barriers that are associated with institutional weakness and corruption (Dorlach et al., 2025).

Later governments still relied on the electoral campaigns, with agricultural reform taking precedence. The Agricultural Transformation Agenda was launched in 2011, and it was designed to enhance agricultural value chains and decrease the dependency on imported food products. The Anchor Borrowers Programme was introduced in 2015 to support credit and farm inputs to the smallholder farmers and assist in boosting domestic food production (Ogunmodede et al., 2020). Despite the fact that this programme increased credit access among most farmers, problems like difficulties in repaying loans and poor distribution of welfare limited the long-term success of this programme. Recent elections have continued to exhibit an agricultural policy. Reformers have suggested political measures related to mechanisation, land access and export promotion as a response to issues such as farmer-herder disputes, risk of climate, and rural unemployment (Alesina et al., 2024). Candidates in the 2023 elections have included in their agricultural policy proposals fertiliser subsidies, irrigation development efforts, and agro-processing efforts aimed at strengthening the agricultural value chains.

Agrarian reforms could also be the means of political mobilisation, according to the political economy scholarship. In other instances, governments will distribute agricultural inputs, credit schemes or extension services in a manner that reinforces political support of certain constituencies (Resnick, 2024). These practises have common clientelism trends that engage access to the public resources with political loyalty. Nigerian elections have still been dominated by a number of policy areas that influence the agricultural reform debate. Access to land is a critical concern, especially concerning the Land Use Act 1978, which regulates the ownership and management of land (Abimbola, 2025). School feeding programmes also have links to agriculture in that the food is purchased locally and serves schoolchildren so that the smallholder farmers are supported, and it has a social impact on the perceptions of government performance (Dorlach et al., 2025). The access to credit is also a burning issue among smallholder farmers, as they are often met by the limitation of interest rates and strict conditions connected to collateral (Balana & Oyeyemi, 2022). Other projects that have seen the involvement of the youth in agriculture have also been part of the electoral debate. Projects like N Power Agro are expected to help young people to be involved in agricultural production and development of agribusiness (Ogunmodede et al., 2020).

Further debates on the agricultural policy are determined by the environmental and security issues. In Nigeria, flooding, drought and soil erosion remain a constant menace to the agricultural output in most parts of this country. Farmer-herder conflicts and general insecurity in some of the regions interfere with agricultural operations. As a result, agricultural reforms now incorporate global warming adaptation strategies and rural insecurity policies by

political candidates. Agricultural reform is closely connected with elections in Nigeria because of its role in terms of rural livelihoods and economic development in the country. Nevertheless, these reforms will be only effective in case of steady policy enforcement, strong institutional capability, and long-term investment. The way the narratives and policy discourses form the perception of voter on agricultural reform can thus be relevant towards the study of the nexus of political communication and electoral behaviour in Nigeria.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Agricultural reform still plays a central role in Nigerian politics and electioneering. Subsequent governments have put in place policies that are aimed at boosting agricultural output, strengthening rural livelihoods, and alleviating food security risks. However, the industry experiences structural shortages, such as poor productivity, poor infrastructure, inadequate access to credit and chronic dependence on food imports. One of the gaps in the literature that need to be closed is that of determining the role of electoral politics in the continuation or break of agrarian policy under different regimes.

Nigeria has shown the agricultural policy to be characterised by considerable volatility as long as political leadership changes. Despite the fact that the structure and performance of discrete programmes are scrutinised by numerous studies, little empirical evidence exists on the role of electoral cycles and political competition as a modulating force to policy sustainability. The constant changes in policies kill the momentum of reform, reduce the long-run benefits, and prevent sectoral improvement. In the past, flagship projects, specifically, Operation Feed the Nation, Green Revolution, the Agricultural Transformation Agenda, and the Anchor Borrowers Programme were envisioned to boost food production and spur rural development. However, these interventions were often changed, reduced or cancelled when new administrations came to power. In many cases, the current regimes would introduce new programmes, not building on already existing ones, often based on some partisan impulse to distinguish their own agenda or redistribute resources.

Electoral cycles increase preference for temporally proximate policy actions. During the election seasons, governments often anticipate conspicuous interventions, such as subsidised inputs and short-run credit instruments, which pay off in the short run in terms of politics. These actions have the propensity to overshadow long-term investments in infrastructure, research, irrigation and value-chain building, which require long-term commitment. This discontinuity is long-term and instigates instability in the agricultural sector. The frequent policy swings discontinue agrarian activities, discourage investment, weaken institutional strength, and undermine the trust that farmers have in the government as custodians of the land. As a result, Nigeria continues to live in a state of food insecurity, food prices continue to rise and the country is susceptible to internal and external unrests. These issues notwithstanding, there is limited empirical support to support the relationship

between electoral politics and instability of agricultural policies. There are few studies that can trace the evolution of policy over electoral cycles or determine the impact of the oscillations on productivity and institutional performance. As a result, a proper understanding of how electoral politics and policy continuity connect to each other is still lacking. This gap needs to be removed to promote better design and implementation of policies. Understanding the influence of the political incentives on the agricultural policy formulation is crucial to promoting the stability of the policy, strengthening the institutional capacity, and enhancing sustainable agricultural growth in Nigeria.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The general aim of the current study will be to investigate the effect of social media stories on policy-specific voting concerning agricultural reform in the electoral period in Nigeria. The research aims to comprehend the way stories that are posted on the social media platform influence the attitude of the voter towards agricultural reform policies, and in what ways the attitude can affect the voter to alter his or her voting behaviour. In particular, the study tries to:

1. Analyse the impact of social media narratives on voters about agricultural reform policies in the course of Nigerian elections.
2. Identify the degree of the influence of social media stories on policy-specific voting in the Nigerian elections based on agricultural reform.
3. Test the hypothesis that exposure to social media stories and voter support of candidates supporting agricultural reform policies increases voter support in Nigerian elections.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions that will be considered in the study are:

1. How do social media narratives influence the perception of Nigerian voters towards agricultural reform policies?
2. To what extent does social media narrative predict policy-specific voting related to agricultural reform in Nigerian elections?
3. Are there significant relationship between exposure to social media narratives and voter support for candidates promoting agricultural reform in Nigerian elections?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Policy-specific voting is a significant concept of electoral behaviour. It is the condition in which voters decide to elect candidates based on the party on specific policy matters as opposed to the primary reason being party loyalty, candidate personality, or ideological identity (Guntermann & Persson, 2023). In the course of this process, voters

consider the policy proposals given during the elections and compare them with their preferences. The party or the candidate with the policy stance that seems to be nearest to the voters will stand a better chance of being supported. Policy-specific voting is thus a rational mode of participation in democracy where the voter tries to choose a representative whose policy behaviour is in accordance with their expectations. Spatial models of electoral competition are closely connected with the theoretical background of policy-specific voting. These models explain the electoral behaviour by placing the voters and the candidates in a multidimensional policy space that measures the positions along the diversity of substantive issues. Proximity models assume that voters will support the candidate whose policy stand is nearest to their own ideal point on this multidimensional space. The less the perceived distance between the preference of the voter and the candidate stands, the higher the chances of getting an electoral support. Directional models provide an augmentative response by predicting the direction of the policy position of a candidate, instead of the specific proximity. Under this, the electorate chooses party members whose policy stance is in their desired direction although the direction in which the candidate is aligned and their desirable point may not necessarily coincide (Rabinowitz and Macdonald, 1989). Empirical evidence shows that proximity models are more appropriate to explain behaviour when dealing with moderately contentious issues and directed intensity is more salient in highly polarised issues.

Researchers has revealed the circumstances that predispose the tendencies to vote based on a policy. One of the determinants is issue salience. In instances where a policy matter attracts, voters become more likely to give that policy matter into consideration when making their election-related choices (Walgrave et al., 2020). Availability of information also moderates this behaviour. When the voters have clear and easily accessible information about the policy positions of political parties, they can compare the policy position of the political parties with their own preferences. This, in turn, enhances the connection between the policy preferences and the voting behaviour (Nordin, 2014). This is also enhanced by political sophistication. A higher level of educational attainment, political interest, and a higher ability to engage with the policy information and apply it to the voting choice is the characteristic of the more competent individuals (Beattie, 2023).

All these factors evidence that policy-specific voting is strongly dependent on the environment of information in general, where the voter is situated. Voters tend to use policy in making their electoral decisions, especially when policy differences among voters are strong as well as when policy information is highly available. This process has been influenced by technological innovative solutions. Such digital tools as voting-advice applications allow voters to compare their preferences to policy to those of candidate parties on several issues at the same time. These tools may increase policy difference awareness and foster issue-based voting, but any prior ideological belief and political attitudes still affect the interpretation of policy information among voters (Monzel, 2025). Much attention has been given to the democratic nature of policy-based voting. As voters choose the leaders according to the policy alignment, the elected officials are more likely to give in to the demands of the voters. It

is this dynamic that leads to increased policy congruence between the government and citizen decisions, and, therefore, democratic accountability (Guntermann & Persson, 2023). However, this will depend on different contextual conditions, such as institutional setups, political culture, and the existence of forces competing to influence such as salient group identities. The effect of policy-specific voting is often diluted in most developing democracies by the competing forces. Carmines and Stimson (1980) argue that, whereby voters do not have the detailed information regarding the policy matters, they tend to base their choices on a less sophisticated clue such as party identification, reputation of the candidate or by evaluating the performance of the government at hand. Therefore, policy-related voting is likely to co-exist with other electoral behavioural patterns and not to predominate in vote choice.

There has also been a significant change in the communicative milieu, on which the voters obtain political information. The social media networks have become strategic platforms in political discussion and policy debate. In this environment, social media discourses are critical in informing people about political matters. The narratives on social media are the stories and meaning created and shared by users on the online platforms, including Twitter (since renamed X), Facebook, Instagram, and Tik Tok. Contrary to the messages of traditional media that follow a structured format, social media messages tend to change in a disjointed and participative fashion. Users make short entries in the form of texts, images, videos, hashtags, and comments that cumulatively form larger stories as time goes by. The meaning is created by interaction with its users and not a lone narrator. According to Dawson and Makela (2020), such contributions can be characterised as micro-stories, which concentrate on daily experiences and the immediate response. Digital interactions like sharing, reposting and commenting create more extensive narratives that are shared through online networks in large numbers.

Considering this as a group phenomenon, social media stories have a powerful impact on the way people perceive social and political matters. The user is not just informed on digital platform, but they equally contribute to the development of the stories that are shared by their networks. Social media stories also enable formation of identities. People use these to give personal stories, group identity and communicate with others who have the same interest or culture. Social media are commonly used, as an example, by the communities of the Diaspora to preserve the cultural identity and collective memory despite the geographical dislocation (Kianpour et al., 2026).

Social media discourses are often used to construct policy discussions and influence opinion in politics. Narratives are created by political actors, activists, and everyday users, highlighting specific accounts of what is happening and refuting the arguments of others. These stories can either preempt collective identities, challenge the legitimacy of political opponents, or put forward policy suggestions in affective ways (Reddi et al., 2021). The algorithms of digital platforms exaggerate all these processes as they prefer giving priority to content that has

received a high level of engagement thus allowing the spread of emotionally charged stories to spread quickly through networks. The spread of narratives so fast can create what researchers refer to as narrative contagion. The massively spread stories encourage more users to create similar content that reinforces the original narrative or expands on it (Zhao et al., 2026). Although such a process can promote an understanding of political problems, it might also lead to ideological polarisation. Online groups have the potential to grow into echo chambers where the users are mostly exposed to information that supports their already held ideas. Misinformation and disinformation can easily spread in such environments especially when they are made in emotive formats. It is empirically proven that stories with strong emotional colouring or having sensational content are more likely to be more engaged with and shared (Hamby et al., 2024; Stubbing et al., 2025).

The growing presence of the social media narratives has great consequences on the political communication. The discourse that goes round online influences the understanding and assessment of policy issues as a greater number of citizens are obtaining their political information online. This influence is so prominent in the areas that impact a vast population like in Nigeria which is in agriculture. Nigeria has a very centralised industry and society within agriculture. A large percentage of the population is dependent on agriculture as a source of employment and livelihood. It is due to this reason that agricultural reform has become a policy issue that reemerges in Nigerian governance and politics. Agricultural reform can be said to be those policies and programmes that are undertaken in an attempt to increase agricultural output, empower rural development, decrease food imports and improve food security.

Agricultural reform in Nigeria has a history of bigger changes in the economy and politics. The initial post-independence policy measures concentrated on the production of export crops and import substitution measures. Nevertheless, the oil boom of the 1970s shifted the focus of the government on agriculture and led to the decrease in productivity. Some reform programmes were launched in reaction in order to revive the sector. Other projects like the operation Feed the Nation, and the Green Revolution aimed to enhance the production of food in the country though were not successful due to poor infrastructure and lack of equal distribution. This resulted in the renewed focus on agricultural development with the restoration of democratic rule in 1999. The National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy came up with agricultural policies that would help in alleviating poverty and encouraging rural workers. Later reforms, like the Agricultural Transformation Agenda that was introduced in 2011, were an effort to modernise agricultural value chains and attract the involvement of the private sector. The reforms have enhanced production in certain regions, but it failed to meet the full demands of farmers on the structural issue.

The other major initiative was the introduction of the Anchor Borrowers' Programme, which was announced in 2015 to assist the smallholder farmers by providing credits and inputs. Research indicates that the programme enhanced access to finance and higher production within certain areas. However, the impact of loan repayments, management inefficiencies and political interference constrained its effectiveness in the long-term. Political-economy researches indicate that political reforms in leadership tend to affect the sustainability of agricultural reforms. New governments often have new programmes as opposed to maintaining old ones. The change in policy frequently may undermine the institution's capacity and create mistrust among the farmers who expect to have consistent governmental support.

Studies on electoral behaviour in Nigeria demonstrate that ethnic identity, regional affiliation, and the relationship of clientelism are often used in determining voting patterns. Ethnic identity is still a powerful indicator of voting behaviour in national elections (Ezedikachi & Ogunsanya, 2025). Electoral results are also affected by clientelistic practices, i.e., vote buying, in which voters may be rewarded with financial or material support in exchange for their support (Adeleke et al., 2024; Hoffmann and Patel, 2022). Irrespective of these factors, policy considerations occasionally determine the voter behaviour. Ex-post reviews of government performance can have some influence on election outcomes. Researchers show that voters can evaluate incumbents by their performance regarding economic affairs, food security, and agricultural schemes (Resnick, 2024). These programmes can affect the perceptions of the effectiveness of governments in rural areas where agricultural policies have tangible impacts (Rogger, 2023).

Another dimension to this is found in the research of social media and agriculture in Nigeria. Some studies are made on the utilisation of digital platforms by farmers and extension workers to locate information concerns related to farming practises, market prices, and agricultural programmes. Social media platforms (WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, etc.) have become relevant in sharing agricultural knowledge and linking farmers with specialists (Alhassan et al., 2022; Ifejika et al., 2019; Udoeye and Madukwe, 2025). Social media has also been associated with youth involvement in agriculture. Online platforms enable young entrepreneurs to advertise agricultural products and gain business opportunities as well as hear about government programmes on the development of agribusiness (Imiti, 2022). Nonetheless, poor internet connectivity, expensive data prices, and low digital literacy levels still frustrate the adoption of such platforms in the majority of rural regions.

Even though these studies demonstrate the increasing role of social media in the agricultural industry in Nigeria, they mostly pay attention to the dissemination of information and extension services, but not to how the discourse about the agricultural reform is spread in the online sphere. There is a dearth of literature that considers the role of social media narratives in influencing public awareness on agricultural policies in the lead-up to elections. The

connection between digital storytelling, the discussion on agricultural reforms, and electoral behaviour is therefore not fully examined. This gap highlights the necessity of further research that would make these areas interrelated. A further look into how social media discourses can influence views of agricultural reform and determine policy-specific voting during elections in Nigeria can shed more light on the interaction between digital communication, voter choice and policy discussion in Nigerian politics today.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research is based in a conceptual point of view that explains the process through which the electorate develops preferences, understands political information, and makes electoral choices. The major theories that will be used to inform this study include the Spatial Theory of Voting, the Agenda Setting and Framing Theory, and the Uses and Gratifications Theory. Those paradigms provide a ground basis on understanding the nexus of social media narratives and voter perceptions and policy-specific voting as applies to Nigerian elections.

The Spatial Theory of Voting provides the context in explaining the voting behaviour based on policy. According to this theory, voters and political actors may be placed inside a policy space based on preferences on the many issues in question. The voters are supposed to choose the candidates whose policy stands are more in line with their preferences. In the proximity models, voting choice depends on the distance between the voter preference and the position of the candidate, but in directional models, the orientation of policy positions is more important than the actual proximity (Rabinowitz and Macdonald, 1989). This model is relevant to the current research because it explains the way in which voters evaluate the policy of agricultural reforms and make a choice based on the perceived congruence with their candidate. However, the theory assumes that the electorate has access to clear and adequate information, which the same might not always be true in real-life electoral scenarios.

To supplement this, the Agenda Setting and Framing Theory describes the nature of how social media stories shape the issues that voters consider and how they address these issues. Agenda-setting is the view that the media platforms determine the salience that people attach to certain issues by devoting disproportionate attention to them. As long as agricultural reform is repeatedly mentioned on social media, it gains even greater prominence and, as a result, has a higher chance of being taken into account by the electorate. This is enhanced by framing theory, which highlights the presentation of issues in specified ways that influence the interpretation. The stories on social media often focus on some aspects of agricultural reform and diminish others, thus shaping voter opinion and policy analysis (Georgakopoulou, 2022). This framework can be used to explain the strong relationship that was found between social media stories and voter perceptions in the study.

The Uses and Gratifications Theory is yet another theory that can be added to this analysis, as it focuses on the agency of the audience in terms of choosing and using the media content. This theory states that people engage

in active preference of media sources that satisfy their needs in a way that includes information, social interaction, or entertainment. In the environment of social media, users are not passive receivers but active participants engaging, interpreting, and sharing content. Therefore, the exposure to social media stories will depend on personal preferences and motivations. In this way, voters can selectively follow narratives that align to their existing beliefs/ interests, thus explaining why social media narratives could have a significant effect on perception but relatively low direct impact on voting.

Together, these theoretical frameworks provide a global knowledge of the investigation. The Spatial Theory of Voting breaks down the mystery of how the alignment of policies can influence the electoral vote; the Agenda Setting and Framing Theory explains how social media affects the perception of policy questions; and the Uses and Gratifications Theory explains how citizens engage with the media and how they interpret information received through the media. The combination of these frameworks allows analysing both cognitive and communicative mechanisms that connect the social media stories to policy-specific voting in Nigerian elections.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative research design to examine the relationship between social media narratives, perceptions of agricultural reform, and policy-specific voting behaviour in Nigerian elections. The design allows for the use of statistical techniques to test relationships among variables and to determine the extent to which social media exposure influences policy-related voting decisions.

Population of the Study

The population of the study consists of Nigerian citizens of voting age. In this study, the respondents will be limited to those listed in the Afrobarometer Round 9 survey that was carried out in Nigeria. The survey is a compilation of the public opinions in regard to governance, political involvement, and socioeconomic matters in the country.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The analytic sample is composed of 1,600 respondents who were sampled out of the Afrobarometer Round 9 Nigerian data. The Afrobarometer project is a project that uses a probability-based method and that is a multistage cluster design sampling. First, the areas of enumeration are stratified geographically; then the selection of households (randomly) is carried out within the clusters, and finally, one competent respondent is interviewed in each household. This methodology chain ensures that the national population is represented.

Data Source

The discussion is based on the secondary data using the Afrobarometer Round 9 merged data. The dataset includes variables related to media exposure, political attitudes, perceptions of government performance, and voting behaviour, which are relevant to the objectives of the study.

Reliability

To test internal consistency, Cronbachs Alpha was used to carry out the reliability analysis. The reliability coefficient of the social media scale was 0.80, which is a good internal consistency. The agricultural reform scale had a coefficient of 0.78, and the policy-specific voting scale had a coefficient of 0.70, which shows acceptable reliability. These results indicate that the items in each scale show consistency and measure one and the same construct.

Method of Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Pearson correlation analysis was used to examine the relationship between social media narratives and perceptions of agricultural reform. Linear regression analysis was employed to determine the influence of social media narratives on policy-specific voting behaviour. Chi-square analysis was used to examine the association between social media exposure and voter support for candidates promoting agricultural reform policies. All statistical tests were done at 0.05 level of significance.

Ethical Considerations

The current research is based on secondary data, obtained through the Afrobarometer dataset, which is easily available to academic research. No personally identifying specifics are included in the dataset, therefore protecting the confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents. As a result, the information was used purely in academic research within the limits of the accepted codes of ethics in research.

RESULTS

Research Question 1

How do social media narratives influence the perception of Nigerian voters towards agricultural reform policies?

Table 1: Summary of correlation matrix showing the relationship between the study variables

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3
Social Media Narratives	19.35	6.08	1.000		
Agricultural Reform	53.23	22.11	0.77**	1.000	

Table 1 indicates that there is a strong positive relationship between the social media stories and the perceptions of the voters of the agricultural reform policies, and its coefficient of determination is 0.77. This implies that the increased exposure to media discourses on social media generates stronger and more articulated views of agricultural reform among voters in Nigeria. Social media is one of the channels through which political information is disseminated and has a strong impact on the way the masses understand political issues. It reframes complicated topics, including agricultural reform, into simpler narratives, and in that way, voters are able to make judgments about the effectiveness of policy and governmental measures (Georgakopoulou, 2022). These stories are co-created and shared on digital platforms, thus supporting common interpretative structures (Dawson and Makela, 2020). The salience of the issues related to agriculture grows, thereby having an impact on the judgments of the voters (Walgrave et al., 2020). However, it might be the case that social media can help spread misinformation, thus deceiving the population (Reddi et al., 2021). In general, social media has a strong impact on voters in terms of their attitudes towards agricultural reform.

Research Question 2

To what extent does social media narrative predict policy-specific voting related to agricultural reform in Nigerian elections?

Table 2: Multiple Regression Analysis on Policy-Specific Voting

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
0.050	0.002	0.002	27.19635

SUMMARY REGRESSION ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	98687.257	1	98687.257	133.426	.000 ^b
Residual	39527909.686	53442	739.641		

Total	39626596.943	53443			
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Regression analysis produced a statistically significant weak effect of social media narratives on policy-specific voting with an R^2 value of 0.02 and a negative beta value of -0.050. This means that social media explains only about 2% of the difference in voting behaviour, which highlights the insignificant direct influence on voting. The results have shown that, despite the influence of narratives spread by social media in shaping perceptual frames, these do not have a significant causal impact on electoral choice. This finding is in agreement with the empirical literature on electoral politics in developing democracies, where voter selection is majorly determined by factors like ethnicity, partisanship, and clientelism (Ezedikachi and Ogunsanya, 2025; Adeleke et al., 2024). This low impact also supports the idea that policy-sensitive voting demands high rates of political information and voter awareness (Nordin, 2014; Beattie, 2023). A negative beta coefficient indicates that socially mediated content that is often motivated by emotional persuasion can be used to reinforce existing beliefs and not to objectively evaluate different policies. Moreover, voters seem to make their decisions based on previous performance, thus indicating the importance of retrospective voting systems (Resnick, 2024).

Research Question 3

Are there significant relationship between exposure to social media narratives and voter support for candidates promoting agricultural reform in Nigerian elections?

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	4564.643 ^a	2528	.000
Likelihood Ratio	4211.921	2528	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	133.096	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	53444		

Symmetric Measures

	Value	Approximate Significance
Nominal by Phi	.292	.000
Nominal Cramer's V	.052	.000
N of Valid Cases	53444	

The chi-square analysis showed that there was a statistically significant correlation between the exposure of social media and voter support of reform-promoting candidates, and the chi-square value was found to be 4564.643 ($p < 0.05$). A robust relationship between the variables is indicated by a strength of the association of 0.52 as calculated by Cramer V.

The results suggest that, despite the lack of a strong explanatory effect of social media stories on an individual's voting behaviour, they are strongly interconnected with group-level voter support patterns. The difference in the preference of the candidate among the voters is linked to the exposure to social media content, which is similar to the literature available today that points toward the impact of social media in developing collective political orientation and strengthening shared identities. Social media is often used as an echo chamber, whereby people are introduced to a piece of information that supports their previously held ideas, thereby reinforcing group-based political disposition (Zhao et al., 2026). The high relationship also indicates the importance of the framing of narratives in the communication of politics. Stories that predetermine certain policy stands or depict candidates in a certain manner can precondition how voters categorise and evaluate political players (Reddi et al., 2021). As a result, those candidates who are always associated with agricultural reform discourses have higher chances of getting the support of voters who have been exposed to them. Besides that, the findings lend credence to the idea of narrative contagion, according to which popularised narratives give rise to more general attitudes and actions. As stories about agricultural reform go around on social media platforms, it helps develop collective interpretations that affect mass voting patterns. In the Nigerian setting, in which the problem of agriculture is closely connected with the rural lifestyle, social media narratives can intertwine with daily life to influence the voter to support a specific candidate. This dynamic can be used to explain why the level of association is strong at the group level, even when there is a relatively low level of direct impact on individual votes. In general, the results indicate that social media stories contribute greatly to the patterns of voter support, although they do not directly influence the voting decision of a specific individual.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The results of this paper explain the nexus between the social media coverage, views on agricultural reform, and voting patterns during the Nigerian elections. The findings show that, although the social media has a significant effect on the way in which the voters understand the policy issues, it does not seem to have a direct effect on the way in which the electors make the decision. The initial research question was exploring to what degree the social

media narratives would affect the perceptions of the agricultural reform policies by the Nigerians voters. The analysis showed a strong positive correlation between exposure to these kind of narratives and perceptions of voters reflected by a correlation coefficient of 0.77. This implies that increased exposure to social media content is associated with more significant and specific attitudes towards agricultural reform among the constituents. This finding supports the available literature that cites social media as one of the key platforms through which political meaning is constructed and propagated. Social media enables voters to be exposed to the more complex issues of policy because it presents policy issues in simplified and accessible forms (Georgakopoulou, 2022). Repeated exposure to such stories helps people to make their judgments on the effectiveness of policies, the performance of the government, and the reforms proposed.

The observation also highlights the groupiness of social media communication. Narratives are built in a collaborative way by engaging the user, which means that the contributions of the individuals come together to create a larger common meaning (Dawson and Makela, 2020). The process increases attention to the agricultural problem and promotes the creation of a shared perception among voters. Furthermore, the finding is also in line with the theory of issue salience, which assumes that voters tend to pay more attention to issues that are heavily brought up in public debate (Walgrave et al., 2020). When the issue of agricultural reform goes viral in social media, it presupposes its increased topicality and forms a vision of voters. However, the effects of social media stories on perception do not necessarily give them accuracy. Previous research has shown that the content of social media can contain inaccurate or emotionally loaded information, thus influencing the general population to form perceptions that do not always represent the actual situation in the policies (Reddi et al., 2021). Therefore, social media can increase the level of awareness, but it can also, at the same time, have an objective-blind influence on perceptions.

The second research question considered the extent to which the social media discourse has any role to play in the policy-specific voter turnout in relation to agricultural reform. The social media narratives produced statistically significant but low impact on voting behaviour with an R^2 of 0.02 and a beta of -0.050 as seen in regression. Therefore, the influence of social media on electoral choice is relatively low. This result has foreshadowed that even though social media influences the conceptualisation of agricultural reform among voters, it does not have a decisive effect on voting patterns. This is in line with other research about electoral behaviour in Nigeria, which indicates that the absence of ethnic identity, party affiliation, and clientelistic networks often influences voting behaviour (Ezedikachi and Ogunsanya, 2025; Adeleke et al., 2024). Policy factors, in these situations, might not be the major factor of electoral selection.

This poor impact corresponds to the view that policy-specific voting requires the availability of transparent

information and some degree of political cognition (Nordin, 2014; Beattie, 2023). Under these conditions of limited prerequisites, voters might simply transmit some simpler cues, like party identity or historical performance. The negative value of the beta is also indicative that the exposure to the social media narratives does not always equate to higher policy-related voting. This can be as a result of the content of social media which in many cases does not involve much analysis of the policies but rather appeals to the emotion. Also, the results indicate the impact of retrospective voting, where voters consider the candidates based on previous achievement rather than potential policy suggestions (Resnick, 2024). The social media accounts in this context might just enforce the existing beliefs without any significant changes in the voting patterns. In general, the findings demonstrate that social media has low predictive power in relation to policy-specific voting behaviour during the elections in Nigeria.

The third research question investigated how exposure to the social media narrative and support of candidates advancing agricultural reform relates. The outcomes showed a statistically significant correlation between the variables with the chi-square value of 4564.643 and Cramer V equal to 0.52, which means that the variables have a strong correlation. This observation raises the fact that social media stories are closely related to voter support patterns. Although social media cannot directly determine the way people will vote, it seems to guide the general support of certain candidates. It is consistent with the research that highlights the importance of social media in strengthening group affiliations and forming group political preferences (Zhao et al., 2026).

The strong correlation also indicates the role of narrative framing in political communication. Candidates and policy areas are presented in specific ways on social media narratives and influence voter assessment consistently (Reddi et al., 2021). The candidate most often associated with the agricultural reform messages is much more likely to gain the subscriber of voters who are exposed to these messages. Besides, the discovery can be viewed in terms of narrative contagion, where highly shared stories affect the general trends in attitudes and behaviour. The spread of the narratives of the agricultural reform through social media platforms is going to add to the common meanings shaping collective patterns of support. These stories can be particularly close to the voters since agriculture in the Nigerian reality is deeply connected to the livelihoods.

Overall, the results prove that social media stories have a large impact on voter perceptions and support patterns, but cannot directly affect voting decisions. This implies that social media is a significant platform of political communication and public interaction, but its impact on electoral behaviour is moderated by other broader social and political forces.

CONCLUSION

This question examined the interaction among social media messages, attitudes toward agricultural reform, and

election-specific voting in Nigerian elections. The findings reveal that the social media narratives have a considerable effect on the understanding of the agricultural reform policies by the voters. The high level of correlation that is evident between these stories and voter attitudes highlights the importance of digital platforms as strategic sources of political information and interpretive content. Repeated exposure to this kind of narration makes it easier to build voter opinion on the issue of policy and government activity. However, the researchers found a small direct effect of social media accounts on policy-specific voting. Inasmuch as the digital platforms contribute to the understanding and perception, they do not have a decisive effect on the individual voter. This result implies that the Nigerian voting patterns are dependent on a number of determinants, such as social, political, and economic factors, which cannot be observed by the policy information alone. At the same time, it was found that social media exposure is strongly correlated with voter support for candidates who support agricultural reform. This association suggests that a social media narrative generates more generalised patterns of political alignment in voters. Although people might not always make their choices with reference to the policy aspects, the stories they tell can influence the choice of the entire population and strengthen the loyalty to the specific candidates.

Overall, the paper explains the complex nature of the influence of social media on the electoral process. It exists as an establishment of perceptions, an influence of the patterns of support, but its direct impact on the policy-based voting choices is circumscribed. These lessons enhance our knowledge of the manner in which online communication is playing with the electoral behaviour in Nigeria, particularly on matters concerning the agricultural policies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, some recommendations are hypothesised. To begin with, policymakers and political actors ought to realise how social media has shaped the perception of the populace with regard to agricultural reform. There should be an attempt to spread plain, correct, and open information concerning agricultural policies in online spaces so that the general population becomes informed.

Second, a call to roll up the educational efforts of voters regarding policy issues. The increased public awareness of the policies and their long-term consequences in agriculture can encourage increased participation in the voting that involves particular policies. Voter education and civic education may help voters to critically assess the policy proposals and make informed electoral decisions.

Third, the regulatory authorities and the relevant institutions must adopt strategies to reduce the spread of fake information through social media. Because the perception can be molded with the help of narratives, even in cases

when the latter is inaccurate, developing the principles of communication based on the facts is the key to improving the quality of the discourse.

Fourth, the parties and candidates should focus on regular and open communication on their agendas in relation to the policy on agriculture. This openness may help build trust among the electorate and strengthen the connection between policy appeals and political funding.

Lastly, more studies are required to determine more factors that affect the voting behaviour in Nigeria, such as the social identity, economic conditions, and institutional factors. The broadened research may lead to a better insight into the motivation of electoral decision-making.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This research has a number of limitations. First, the use of secondary data restricts the ability of the researcher to manage how the variables were measured initially. The research relies on the information from the Afrobarometer survey, which might not be able to encompass all aspects of social media stories or policy-related voting.

Second, the data is not longitudinal; therefore, it does not allow for establishing causal relationships. Although the associations between variables are apparent, the data fail to support the claim that the narratives provided by social media are the direct cause of the situation of perception or voting behaviour changes with time.

Third, social media narratives are measured based on the broad indicators of exposure and not on the specific content. This means that the study fails to distinguish the different types of stories (including informative, misleading, and persuasive) that may have different effects.

Fourth, the relatively low explanatory power of regression models means that other salient factors that may have affected the voting behaviour were not included. Other variables might have substantive roles like ethnicity, political trust, and economic conditions.

Lastly, the research is confined to the Nigerian setting, which can be problematic when it comes to extrapolating the study results to other nations that have a different political and social setting. Despite the limitations, the study provides useful information regarding the connection between social media, perception of policy, and electoral behaviour in Nigeria.

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