

The Media And The Shaping Of Political Narratives: A Study Of The 2015 Presidential Elections In Nigeria.

By

Lavender Odinaka Ekweremadu

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of the MA in [Journalism & Media Communications], is my own; based on my personal study and/or research, and that I have acknowledged all material and sources used in its preparation. I also certify that I have not copied in part or whole or otherwise plagiarised the work of anyone else, including other students.

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Abstract

In any society, the role of the media is huge and cannot be denied. The media has been a strong platform for promoting and protecting human rights, as well as keeping people updated on events and activities in society. In the annals of Nigeria's history, the role of the media is noteworthy. During the periods of military rule, the media was like a leviathan against dictatorship despite the attacks on journalists and media houses. Notably, the media played a major role during the June 12 annulment saga as well as during the inglorious brutal dictatorship of the late General Sani Abacha. After the military left the political scene, giving room for democratic rule on May 29, 1999, Nigerians have maintained high hopes for a democratic society. Post-1999, Nigeria has experienced several general elections (in 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019), occurring every four years.

The role of the media has become so huge that the integrity of the Nigeria's electoral system is critically scrutinized and ascertained in the media. This study examines the media coverage, by three newspapers (Punch, The Nation and Premium Times), of Goodluck Jonathan, incumbent President of Nigeria during the 2015 presidential campaigns, and his major contender, Muhammadu Buhari, to determine how news is constructed as well as discuss framing patterns in these reports. The study demonstrates that the tone and content used to report issues about an election can promote political disengagements and media cynicism. It also reveals that the media coverage of the 2015 Nigerian presidential election was overtly negative and conflict-driven. The media focused predominantly on incapability and provided a pessimistic or negative view of political actors.

This study also examines how ownership and political-affiliation of media houses influences the kind of news presented. This is done based on the Nigerian Presidential election held in 2015.

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

This study sets out to examine the use of the media in the shaping of political narratives. With the 2015, Nigerian Presidential election used as a case study, this study will present a framing analysis of selected news content in the media on the 2015 election. The study will also discuss how news content were framed and presented to the public.

Election is vital in the democratic process, enabling the citizens to decide in a hopefully fair and free manner who should lead them at different levels of government for a period. Obakhedo (2011) defined election as a strategic tool for determining political leadership in a democratic society. It can also be a means to engage in the democratic process, as well as a process by which citizens give consent to be led a set of governments (Dye, 2001). Basically, a democratic society cannot be achieved if there are no elections. Nonetheless, Huntington (1991) believes that democracy is attained in a society if “its most powerful collective decision-makers are selected through fair, honest and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes, and in which virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote” (p661). A good way to reach out to the citizens prior to (and even after) elections is through the media.

In modern politics, the media has made it more feasible for politicians to reach out to all the electorate when trying to gain support to win elections. The media plays an imperative role in achieving democracy in any country, acting as a mediator and overseer of the electoral process. They ensure that information is available to voters and that the activities of stakeholders in the electoral and political process are consistent with laid-down rules and international best

practices. It is the utmost responsibility of the media to provide avenues and opportunities for citizen participation and inclusion in politics. To succeed in politics, one needs to pay attention to media coverage, which helps to shape one's perception by the public. The irreplaceable value of the media is emphasised by Thomas Jefferson, the third American President, as cited in Nwabueze and Ebeze (2013), when he said, "Where it is left for me to choose whether we should have a government without the press or a press without government, I shall not hesitate a moment to choose the latter."

With the aid of the news media, party candidates can pass on information to voters to gain their support winning elections. Affirming the essence of the media, Kurfi (2010, p.295) said, "It is arguable that without access to the full range of information about their world, citizens cannot fulfil their roles, and democracy will wither." Nonetheless, the media's objectives may differ from how politicians use the media, especially within the period of elections. In concurrence, Balkin (1999) asserted that politicians and the media usually do not treat the public as a kind of enemy; instead, the focus of the politicians is mainly to shape public opinion and win over the public. The media is thus used to maintain public attention and influence.

Often, political motives, rather than profit, underscore the decision to create and own media houses (Ibraheem et al. 2013). According to Noelle Neumann (1979), as cited in Folarin (2002, p.78), "Ideas, occurrence and persons exist in public awareness practically only if they are lent sufficient publicity by the mass media, and only in the shapes that the media ascribe to them." In this light, it is not surprising that many politicians would go to any length to create and maintain a good public image through the press while shielding their weaknesses from the inquisitive eyes of the media.

Historically, several media houses were established primarily to uphold one or more political interests. The first set of Nigerian newspapers were created by nationalists, who focused on fighting against colonial administration as well as advocating for Nigeria's independence. Such newspapers include Beele Blaize's *Lagos Times* (1862), J.B. Benjamin's *Lagos Observer* (1882), *the Eagle* and *Lagos Critic*, both established by Emric Macaulay in 1887. There was also a series of newspapers published by the defunct Concord Press, which was owned by Chief M.K.O Abiola, the acclaimed winner of the controversial June 12, 1993 Nigerian presidential election. There are also present-day newspapers owned by politicians or their allies, who front for them as publishers. This set includes Gbenga Daniel's *Compass*, Ibru's *Guardian* newspapers, Jimoh Ibrahim's *National Mirror*, Nduka Obaigbena's *ThisDay*, Orji Uzor Kalu's *The Sun*, Tinubu's *The Nation*, Mohammed Haruna's *Trust* titles, and the *Nigerian Tribune* owned by the Awolowo dynasty – to mention just a few.

The strength and effectiveness of the media in Nigeria was tested by the annulment of the June 12, 1993 general election, during the General Ibrahim Babangida's rule. Journalists sensitized the masses about the vices committed by the military dictatorship and the elite who supported the annulment of an election considered to be one of the fairest and freest Nigerian polls ever done (Olowojolu, 2016). The Nigeria media also played a pivotal role during the General Sani Abacha regime as there were consistent attacks on his anti-democratic actions (Ngara & Esebonu, 2012). The media was actively involved in discrediting the General Sani Abacha regime that saw to the incarceration of Moshood Kashimawo Abiola (Olowojolu, 2016). The consistency of the information given by the Nigerian media about the misuse of power during the military era as well as the essence of a democratic nation turned out to be crucial towards the

mobilization of the general public and international community towards pressuring the military government to hand over power to the civilians (Ngara & Esebonu, 2012).

The role of the media in electioneering campaigns is basically to provide the masses with information about registered political parties, with focus, also, on their programmes and contesting candidates. Such information is vital as it will enable the citizens to know about each party and its candidates before casting their votes for any party's candidates. Norris (1997, p223-224) asserted that:

One of the primary functions of the media's coverage of the campaign is to increase information about the choices on offer, stimulating interest in public involvement in the process, [...] watching politicians debate the major issues during the campaign may stimulate viewers to feel better informed, more aware of the choices on offer, and therefore better equipped to exercise their choice at the ballot box.

Lou (1971) as cited in Chukuma (2010, p.2) agrees that:

Campaign reporters should project the candidates' image by giving them ample press coverage (by the frequency and depth of the reports). They should also endeavour to highlight the candidate's potentials and shortcomings but with absolute detachment. In other words, they should do critical and objective analysis of the candidates with the aim of educating the electorate in this capacity.

The public usually depends on the media for information on the electoral process. They search for information about the ideologies, policies, and manifestoes of parties, alongside the

competence of the candidates contesting for the elections (Egbuna, 2012). According to Maisel (2007, p.2), “Democratic regimes span a wide spectrum in terms of how freely those in power can be criticised by the press or by the opposition [...] the amount of information to which citizens have access in reaching their judgements, and the freedom that candidates have to express their views and that citizens have to vote.” Therefore, it is important for a journalist to provide adequate information about each party and its candidates in a way that would help voters to make the proper decision to vote for the candidate they prefer. Konkwo (2003) suggested that the media has a crucial duty when it comes to providing voters with information as the voter’s decision should not be guided based on what each candidate can instantly offer to the masses, but should be guided based on public assessment of the policy and capability of each candidate.

The media must empower voters with adequate information about the several processes involved in election as well as analyse policies and candidates of all parties to facilitate the process of citizens making informed decisions (Fatoba 2012; Ngara & Esebonu 2012). For this to be accomplished, the media has the responsibility to ensure effective coverage of the whole electoral process as well as ensure the protection of voters’ rights by presenting full and accurate information, and enabling participation in debates and dialogues on the electoral process and engagement, with relevant stakeholders throughout the electoral process (Ngara & Esebonu 2012; Olowojolu, 2016). As a journalist, one must ensure that one provides enough unbiased information on the personality profile of each candidate. This will help keep the public abreast of the personality, policies, and capability of each candidate before they make the decision to vote them into political office.

1.2 Statement of the problem

It has become so easy to create or consume information that anyone with an internet enabled phone can engage in this act. The information created on the social media platforms could be personal and biased, or impersonal and free of bias. Bigger and trusted media platforms like television and radio houses can control the type and quality of information they disseminate to citizens such as what happened in the 2015 election to be precise. Some analysts claim that the party affiliations of the individuals in charge of media platforms can affect how these platforms report on politics in general and elections.

Although there was a total of 11 parties that contested in the 2015 Nigerian presidential election, only two major candidates were prominently projected to the public: the candidate of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), Goodluck Jonathan, and the candidate of the All Peoples' Congress (APC), Muhammadu Buhari; this raises questions about media platforms being partisan (Iheduru, 2010; Siollun 2015).

This is the premise on which this research project stands. It seeks to document media framing of candidates during elections, using Goodluck Jonathan and Muhammadu Buhari during the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria. The study also seeks to draw reasonable conclusions on how the media can be used as a tool to enhance the democratic process.

1.3 Research questions

1. Was the Nigerian media non-partisan in its coverage of the 2015 election?
2. Did media ownership affect equal coverage and conspicuity of presidential aspirants in the 2015 election?

1.4 Research objectives

1. To examine the slant of coverage of aspirants Goodluck Jonathan and Muhammadu Buhari during the 2015 presidential election.
2. To determine possible bias towards or against either candidate during the election.
3. To determine a possible correlation between the type and slant of election stories covered by the media and the ownership of the mediums under study.

1.5 Significance of the study

The study shall provide knowledge on how media coverage of elections in Nigeria can be strengthened through an understanding of the various roles of several media practitioners and owners, as well as prevent nepotism and bias during publication of information.

Furthermore, this study shall set out to develop proper understanding of media coverage and its effects on the electioneering process in Nigeria, towards future elections. In this light, it presents and discusses certain fundamental factors promoting efficient media coverage of the elections. It also examines some of the strengths, weaknesses and implications related to the different practices of media practitioners and owners.

Finally, it will be of importance to schools and students as a reference point for future researchers who will want to study this subject further.

1.6 Definition of terms

Election: This is a process by which people (the electorate) vote to choose an individual or a group of individuals to occupy (an) official position(s).

Media coverage: This is the method of communication designed to reach out to a huge number of people, and is done through television, newspapers, radio, and social media.

Democracy: This is a type of government in which the masses have power to vote and be voted for into political office in a free electoral system.

Commentator: A person who discusses news, sporting events, weather, and other relevant information on several platforms for people's consumption.

Annulment: It is a legal procedure for declaring something invalid.

Incarceration: It refers to the state of being imprisoned due to a penalty imposed by in court.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Several research has emphasized the vital role of the media in a democratic institution. It has also been argued that the media has been deployed by different power interests in the society to achieve certain force and effect within the political arena and the society. In the dynamic world of journalism, news reporting has become increasingly interpretative with campaigns seen as a game (Iyengar, Norpoth, & Hahn, 2004; Aalberg, Strömbäck, & De Vreese, 2011). There has been an established interaction between behaviours of political actors, the public and the media content, and this has led to research such as how endorsement (Chiang & Knight, 2011), editorial slant (Druckman & Parkin, 2005), negativity (Lengauer, Esser, & Berganza 2011), news framing and bias (Entman, 2010), and party agenda (Hopmann, Elmelund-Praestekaer, Albæk, Vliegenthart, & de Vreese, 2012) have shaped media logic in analysing political activities. Researches into media bias, framing and negativity provide a critical understanding of how journalists cover politics are and how that coverage might be influenced by several things such as a journalist's opinion (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996 as cited in Hopmann, DeVreese, & Albæk, 2011).

Furthermore, investigations on news bias, power and influence, especially during democratic transitions, tend to examine relationships between reporters and news sources (Berkowitz, 2009), along with approaches and forms of negativity towards political news (Lengauer et al., 2011); provoking questions on whether reporters or sources wield larger influence when it comes to shaping the news stories, and "how journalist's use of sources lead

towards a particular news frame that either favour or excludes some issues over others” (Berkowitz, 2009, p102), or how negative profiling of candidates influence the audience’s perceptions of candidates (Niven 2001; Walter & Vliegenthart 2010; Lengauer et al. 2011). These studies suggest a different pattern of news frames that either present political candidates or parties in a negative or positive slants during electioneering campaigns (Niven 2001; Druckman & Parkin 2005; Entman, 2010; Chiang & Knight 2011).

Without the media, safeguarding the credibility and transparency of the electoral process would be difficult (Aghamelu, 2012). A biased media can jeopardize the electoral process, thereby destroying the democracy of a nation. However, the connection between the media and politics must be viewed from the angle of the politician whose desire is to win an election. (Pate, 2011).

In this second chapter, we will examine different research materials related to the topic of this study. The essence is to identify existing views of researchers, as well as to provide a deeper insight into the study. At the end of this chapter, we will identify the gap that this current study is set to fill.

2.2 Nigerian political parties: system and dynamics

The activities of political parties are very crucial in the evaluation of a democratic practice all over the world. These activities are at the heart of examining the health of any form of democracy (Abubakar, 2014; Galadima, 2014; and Simbine, 2014). According to Anifowose and Enemuoh (2000, p.195) “a political party is a group bonded in policy and opinion in support of a general political cause, which essentially is to pursue, capture and retain for as long as there is a

democratically feasible government and its office.” Jinadu (2011) defined a political party as any platform that offers the electorate with a choice of candidates and policies to choose from for a fixed number of years.

The formation and development of political parties in Nigeria date back to 1923, when the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) was born. This was because of the development of the Nigerian Legislative Council (NLC) which created room in the political space for the involvement of indigenes in the nation’s political affairs (Ezeilo, 2012). A more progressive and fierce political movement was established with the development of the Nigerian Youth Movement in 1938, and the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) in 1944 under the authority of Herbert Macaulay (Ibrahim, 2006). The Action Group (AG) developed in 1948 while the Northern Peoples’ Congress (NPC) came in 1951. These parties were political articulations of ethno-regional relationships – with the AG in the west advancing a Yoruba cultural affiliation, Egbe Omo Oduduwa; the NPC developing a northern social affiliation, Jamiyar Mutanen Arewa; and the NCNC, fostering a cultural affiliation of the Igbo State Union (Domingo & Nwankwo, 2010). With the coming of political parties, there was an intensification of the struggle against colonialism.

The first general election in Nigeria was on the eve of independence, and it featured the three major political parties with electoral victories shown in their regions of origin. In the East, the NCNC won, the NPC won in the North, and in the West, the AG won, with initially 44 seats, which increased to 49 as some NCNC members declared for the Action Group (Orugbani, 2005).

In the first republic (October 1, 1960 to January 15, 1966), the Nigerian political system was described by Crawford Young as a “three-person game, with bidding shares ultimately

determined by the electoral mechanism. The three actors enter the contest with a given demographic allocation 29 percent for the Hausa-Fulani, 20 percent for the Yoruba, 17 percent for the Ibo – if they succeeded in mobilizing their full cultural community” (Young, 1993, p292). The three referred to here were Alhaji Tafawa Balawe (Prime Minister), Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe (President), and Chief Obafemi Awolowo (Leader of Opposition) after the NPC-NCNC alliance. During this time, Nigeria adopted the parliamentary system of government.

The ruling political elites then went through inter and intra-party rivalries – the AG, Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Chief S. L. Akintola rivalry leading to election crisis in the Western Region in 1962 and further imposition of state of emergency in the region on 29th May, 1962 (Harriman, 2006); the treason trial of Chief Awolowo and some AG chieftains; the controversial 1963 census which acknowledged the North to be more populated with 55%; the lack of a truly national party, and then the January 15, 1966 coup led by Major C.K. Nzeogwu, which sacked the first republic and resulted in military incursion into politics.

There was enormous electoral fraud in the 1964 and 1965 elections, and that led to a political emergency that prompted the breakdown of the First Republic (Abutudu, Iwuamadi & Kelechi, 2011). The military committed a great deal of resources into concocting new party systems they thought would be increasingly national and less troublesome. Both the Gowon and Murtala regimes attempted to direct the nation towards a zero-party or one-party system with the reasonable expectation of setting up progressively successful state command over the political procedure (Ibrahim, 2006; Ezeilo, 2012).

In the Second Republic, the 1979 Constitution restricted individual candidates from contesting elections, and prohibited regional, ethnic, religious and radical gatherings (Ibrahim,

2006). The change procedure supported the rise of one predominant gathering, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), which was set up in 1978 as an alliance of different divisions who were concerned with tackling the local governmental issues of the First Republic.

Following 13 years of military rule, the Murtala/Obasanjo's regime decided to hand over to civilian rule. This hand over led to the 1979 constitution, which allowed an executive president after the American model, departing from the British- styled parliamentary system. The Supreme Military Council (SMC) of Murtala/Obasanjo approved a five-stage programme to ensure a smooth transition to civil rule. The programme included state creation, settling down of the created states prior to election, removing the ban on political activities, and then elections into the states and federal houses before handing over (Odinkalu, 2001).

The 1979 general election was contested by Chief Awolowo of the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), Nnamdi Azikiwe of the Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP), Alhaji Shehu Shagari of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), Alhaji Aminu Kano of the Nigeria Advance Party (NAP), and Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim of the Nigerian National Congress (NNC). The election ended with Alhaji Shehu Shagari having 5,698, 857 votes; chief Obafemi Awolowo having 4,916, 651 votes; Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe having 2,822, 523 votes, Alhaji Aminu Kano having 1,732, 113 votes; and Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim having 1,686, 489 votes (Ojiako, 2003). The electoral victory of Alhaji Shehu Shagari was challenged by Chief Awolowo, who argued that Alhaji Shehu Shagari was not duly elected by a majority of lawful votes in breach of section 34A(i)(c) (ii) of the Electoral Decree 1977 and section 7 of the Electoral (Amendment) Decree 1978. The election was also roundly condemned as a farce by other political parties.

The second republic failed owing to the loss of faith in the electoral umpire, Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) after declaring Shagari winner. In addition, political office holders turned out to be corrupt. There were other issues such as ruined economy, inter/intra party rivalries and the 1983 electoral fraud, which led to the return of Shagari for a second term. This caused the military to intervene on December 31, 1983.

The Third Republic that never was witnessed a flurry of new parties cropping up despite prohibition of these by the Ibrahim Babangida government. At some point, Babangida set up two political parties, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) – “slightly to the left” – and the National Republican Convention (NRC) – “slightly to the right” (Alkali, 1999, p1-2). The Babangida’s administration reduced the number of political parties from five in the second republic to two in the third republic. There were several political associations formed to terminate IBB’s regime in 1992. A minority group of the 1986 political Bureau, had proposed 1992 as terminal date while the majority, 1990. Decree No. 19 of 1987 established the National Electoral Commission (NEC).

With a resolve to free the political system of the ghost of the negative influences of the previous era, said to be represented by the “old brigade (politicians), General Babangida declared that his administration:

...will not handover political power to any person or persons no matter how distinguished or wealthy but rather to a virile civilian political organization which is openly committed to the purpose of power in the national, nation’s interest. Those who think otherwise and who are now parading themselves as presidential candidates for 1992 would be disappointed in the end (Alkali, 1999, p 2).

After discrediting the process and action of the November 1992 presidential primaries which led to the emergence of Alhaji Adamu Ciroma (NRC) and Shehu Yar'adua (SDP), General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida cancelled the primaries, saying:

It is no longer news that the events which preceded the armed forces ruling council's decision constitute a set back to the transition programme and pose a serious dilemma to me, not only as a person but also as a general and officer of the Nigerian Army, the president and commander-in-chief of the armed forces of Nigeria... No less in dilemma are our country men and women who looked forward to that date, January 2, 1993, when our country was supposed to commence the full stage of the transition programme and from other democratic nations around the world (Alkali, 1999, p4).

He further added that:

all presidential aspirants were extremely distrustful of one another... the committee of aspirants only knew those they do not want, but have no idea of who they want, except their individual selves... the aspirants imbibed the worst culture of the Nigeria political class that feels and sees any election as the last election which must be contested, fought and won at all costs. The explanation for the foregoing pathologies can be sought in the heavy financial investment committed to politics... the presidency should not be for sale (Alkali, 1999, p4).

With hope for a credible democratic process, Nigerians voted on June 12, 1993 with Chief M. K. O Abiola (SDP) winning the election, which was devoid of ethno-religious sentiment (like the flawed process in the past). However, a series of mitigations were filled to stop the polls and announcing of results by the chairman NEC Prof Humphrey Nwosu. In addition, defaulting on his words, General Ibrahim announced the annulment of the polls, repealing Decrees 13 and 52 of 1993, based on which the election had been conducted. According to the government, the annulment was necessary “to save the judiciary from further ridicule and erosion of confidence and that a delay of seven days by NEC, to comply with the court injunction of June 10, 1993, before conducting the election could have saved the nation all the subsequent crises and upheaval” (Alkali, 1999, p7). The annulment of the election precipitated the breakdown of the Third Republic before it took off (Idi, 2015).

Following the turmoil of the annulment and sacking of Nwosu, Prof. Okon E. Uya was appointed to clean up the mess. General Ibrahim stepped aside for an interim national government, headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan, whose reign was for 82 days as he was replaced by General Sani Abacha in November 1993. In general, the General Ibrahim’s regime underwent economic decline, social decadent, the fall of the middle class, and the lengthiest political crisis since the civil war (Falola, 2001).

Under the Abacha’s regime (from November 17 - June 8, 1998) Nigeria became a pariah state recording the most authoritarian ruler ship ever in her political history. Abacha’s offer for transition was regarded as insincere, even with the existence of five political parties, which are Congress of National Consensus (CNC), Grassroots Democratic Movement (GDM), National Conscience Party of Nigeria (NCPN), Movement for Democratic Justice (MDJ), and United Nigeria

Congress Party (UNCP). Even when less resentful but tele-guided elections to local governments, states and national legislatures were conducted in 1996 by National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON), the successful candidates were not inaugurated (Fwatshak, 2009).

Abacha's sudden death led to the emergence of General Abdulsalam, who planned and implemented a short transition programme with the creation of the Independent Electoral Commission, (INEC), and the registration of several political parties such as People's Democratic Party (PDP) All Peoples Party (APP), and Alliance for Democracy (AD). These newly established political parties had traces of ideology and composition with their forebears in the first republic. For example, the AD was Yoruba, an off-shoot of Awolowo's AG. The presidential election was between two candidates – Chief Olusegun Obansajo (PDP) and Chief Olu Falae (APP-AD). By focusing on the South West geopolitical zone, it seems there was an attempt to offer a compensation / reconciliation for the annulled June 12, 1993 polls. The PDP candidate won and was sworn-in on May 29, 1999 as the second elected president after Alhaji Shehu Shagari. May 29, therefore, became Democracy Day in Nigeria. Although Nigeria's fourth republic has witnessed four general elections (1999, 2003, 2007, and 2011), it was yet to show profound evidence of a growing democracy (Dkihru, 2011).

The Fourth Republic began with the 1999 Constitution. While for its first elections, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) registered just three political parties – the People's Democratic Party (PDP), the All Peoples Party (APP), and the Action for Democracy (AD), there was a Supreme Court judgment on a case known as *Balarabe Musa v. INEC*, which led to the conditions for enrolment of political parties becoming liberalized. Subsequently, Nigeria's political space experience an unprecedented opening with the emergence of 63 registered

political parties by April 2011 (Pate, 2011). These new parties include the likes of the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), the Congress for Political Change (CPC), and the People's Progressive Alliance (PPA), which started to develop a strong presence in the political scene. Moreover, numerous little parties exploited the liberalization of the political space to register parties that have proven to be unviable, yet intended to be vehicles through which INEC's financing backing to political parties could be cornered (Abutudu, Iwuamadi & Kelechi, 2011). With judicial intervention making the registration process for political parties to become liberalized, 30 political parties were registered after the 1999 election, with the entrance of many retired military officers (mostly wealthy ex-Generals) into political parties.

On the performance of INEC, the 2003 and 2007 were horrendous. For instance, electoral tickets were given to people who never contested primaries. Aside from that, total votes polled more than accredited voters in a polling unit. The courts were therefore faced with election petitions, with many states having to re-run or the wrong candidate's stolen mandate retrieved and offered to the rightful candidate. This was the case in Edo State (in 2008 and 2012), Ekiti and Osun.

To promote credible elections with the presence of solid political parties, Section 78(6) of the 2010 Electoral Act provided INEC with the ability to de-register any political parties that failed to win any official and authoritative seats in decisions. Just ten parties won seats in the 2011 elections (Idi, 2015). On August 18, 2011, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) de-registered seven political parties that did not contest for any political office in the 2011 Nigeria's general elections. They are the Democratic Alternative, National Action Council, National Democratic Liberal Party, Masses Movement of Nigeria, Nigeria People's Congress, Nigeria

Elements Progressive Party, and the National Unity Party (Idi, 2015). The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) also announced its aim to de-register more parties when the various court cases by some of the parties were determined. Towards the end of 2012, an extra 31 political parties were de-registered, leaving 27 political parties.

There seems to be political rivalry within a ruling party more than among opposing political parties. This explains why certain politicians often switch parties. The reason for this intra-party rivalry may be because since 1979, Nigeria has built up the custom of major blocs of the political elite coalescing into a single political party conceived as a hegemonic party (Ibrahim, 2006).

In addition, for certain people, party membership may only last for a short period as they participate in the political process as either patrons or clients to achieve certain personal interests. What this means is that the attachment of certain people to a party is not really for the interest of the party, but to form relationships with certain patrons or godfathers, who will reward them for their participation in the party politics. What this implies is that participation in the activities of a political party is mediated by political cabals to whom people owe loyalty. Around election period, there are more party activities and patrons tend to engage in party activities too and influence certain decisions regarding obtaining nomination and getting political positions for themselves or their surrogates (Ezeilo, 2012). When a patron is unable to obtain a desired position, such a patron tends to move out with their loyal followers to other parties in search of new opportunities. In this light, loyalty to political parties is very fluid and opportunistic both for the patrons and their followers. It would not be surprising to find that several people own multiple party cards as they want to be invited to as many party congresses as possible

where they would be able to pay participants for their votes. Such people can easily move from one party to another in search of opportunities for themselves and their followers.

Within the Nigerian political scene, the ideology question and the left/right divide have basically disappeared; now, conflicts are focused on the issue of ethnic groups, geopolitical zones, personalities, and the control of power. Also, party manifestos stimulate little interest or debate because the parties simply present them to fulfil a constitutional obligation (Ezeilo, 2012; Idi, 2015). Therefore, the major challenge for political party development is to bring critical issue-based politics back to the fore. During the Second Republic for instance, the NPN was acknowledged for its housing policy, the PRP for its resistance to taxing the poor, and the UPN for its devotion to free education. It is quite difficult nowadays to associate any issue with any political party. The inspirations for engagement in party activities in Nigeria today are power and money. The inspirations for political contest are supremacy and control not ideology (Abutudu, Iwuamadi & Kelechi 2011).

Civility is one quality that is mainly absent in political party life. The most essential aspect of the internal functioning of political parties in Nigeria since 1978 is that they have an obstinate tendency to factionalize and fractionalize. As more people enter politics for power and money, the battle for access becomes deep and destructive. Thuggery, betrayal and violence are often the tools for political party engagement, especially during elections (Ezeilo, 2012). The bitter reality within the political scene is that many political parties are basically operated by political “godfathers” who use money and violence to control the political process (Abutudu, Iwuamadi & Kelechi, 2011). These godfathers decide on party nominations and campaign results, and when candidates make any attempt to navigate an independent course, violence becomes a

mechanism to deal with them. This then leads to an increase in the level of electoral violence; thereby, making free and fair elections challenging. Even though parties have formal techniques for the election of their leaders, these techniques are often overlooked; when they are observed, the godfathers have means of choosing the outcomes of the elections. The rate of violence, thuggery, and monetization of Nigerian politics tend to discourage women from vying for office, and the monetization aspect of the game makes young people less likely to influence politics in an actual way due to their inferior level of access to resources (Ezeilo, 2012).

According to Jinadu (2011), the functions and responsibilities of political parties in Nigeria include: (i) recruitment or reproduction of the political class; (ii) membership recruitment; (iii) patronage disbursement; (iv) organization party bureaucracy; (v) involvement in policy formulation; (vi) voter education and mobilization; and (vii) Protecting and defending the country's constitution.

The Nigerian political scene witnessed a number of interesting events such as the botch third-term bid of Obasanjo; threats of impeachment of the President; increase in corruption; the politics that surrounded the illness, treatment, death and replacement of President Yar'adua in 2010; the emergence of a president from the minority extraction; the issue of zoning; the registration and deregistration of political parties; and the mega merger of All Progressive Congress (APC) to challenge the political dominance of the PDP. It should be stated that most of these parties are neither national nor parties in the strict sense. With a claim of free, fair and credible elections, the 2015 elections led to victory for the opposing party, marking a milestone in the Nigerian political history.

2.3 Media coverage of elections in Nigeria (1999-2011)

Election periods always generate a lot of interest, particularly among the political candidates, and the citizenry. This is because the destiny of the people and the nation lies on the candidates successful at the polls. This, perhaps, explains why both political actors and their supporters use different persuasive strategies to attract support and entice voters to gain and control power.

Omenugha (2015, p.64) asserts that “the media are essential to democracy, and a democratic election is impossible without the media coverage.” According to Daramola (2003), media coverage can be defined as a process of directing information or ideas to a large and diversified audience via the use of mass media platforms such as television, radio, internet and other forms of the media. In addition, Peter (2012) noted that most of the electorates depend on the mass media for the messages about the candidates and not directly from the candidates, but from the news media. Many experts have argued that, for an election to go well, it must be free and fair. Therefore, the media has been listed as an integral part of good governance, useful in shaping governmental relationships. Additional study by Hallin and Paolo (2004) observed that the mass media are assuming many of the functions that political party once controlled. Rather than learning about an election at a campaign rally or from party canvassers, the mass media have become the main source of campaign information. Also, Swanson (2004) notes that in place of or in addition to traditional campaign practices such as rallies of the party faithful, political parties and candidates, rely on the sophisticated use of the mass media to persuade voters to support them at election time.

Overholser and Jamieson (2006, p.45) assert that

In choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality. Readers learn not only about a given issue, but also how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in the news story and its position. In reflecting what candidates are saying during a campaign, the mass media may well determine the important issues, that is, the media may set the agenda of the campaign.

As noted by Omenugha (2015), a free and fair election is more than just the freedom to vote and more than just the knowledge of how to cast one's vote; it encompasses a participatory process that enables voters to engage in public debate as well as have access to ample information about political parties, policies, contesting candidates and the election process itself to be able to make informed choices. Pye (1966, p.156) says:

The communication process thus gives form and structure to the political process by surrounding the politicians on the one hand with the constant reminder that political acts have consequences and that people can have insatiable expectations of politics, and on the other side with the warning that illusions of omnipotence are always dangerous, even among people who have a casual understanding of causality.

McQuail (2005, p. 523) acknowledged that "in democracy, the media usually find their *raison d'être* in their service to their audience, to whom they provide information and education". In doing this, Curran (2011) concurs that the media aid voters in making an informed

choice at election time. Via the use of the mass media vehicles, the mass media act as primary agents of mobilization and campaign of political process, thereby enabling active involvement in public life.

In 1999, the Independence National Electoral Commission's (INEC) foremost task was to conduct a national voter registration exercise. Registration held from October 5-19th, 1998. There were logistical issues that obstructed INEC's efforts at every stage of the election process. Shortage of materials, delays in the opening of registration centres, poorly trained officials, and attempts by political party agents to manipulate the process were among the many issues. More significantly, the 57,369,560 people officially registered to vote surpassed reliable estimates of the total number of worthy voters possible in Nigeria (Nwodu, 2003). INEC regulations, although carefully projected, set the stage for deep competition between parties to attract and retain prominent politicians, potential candidates, and financial backers, mainly in the part of the country where they are at disadvantage and have little or no support (Daramola, 2013). Meanwhile, the more established parties, such as the PDP and APP, drew on political machinery in place from past elections to give them an absolute advantage in garnering financial and political support. The only parties to eligible for the local elections – the Action for Democracy, All Peoples Party, and People's Democratic Party – scrambled to absorb unsuccessful parties or co-opt their leaders and financial backers. Voters, already trying to decide among parties without clearly specified platforms, were also confronted with an INEC agenda that required parties to submit their candidates' information in three weeks, before each election. Party primaries often occurred just days before the deadlines, so the selection of candidates, campaign period, and process of voting was often frenzied and confused (Oboh, 2015). Adding to the confusion, the

ballots excluded the candidate names: only the party names and symbols appeared. Voters often went to the polls without knowing the name of their party's candidate. With parties and candidates generally keeping quiet about issues, "big money" politics shaped the evolution, mainly in the latter voting rounds (Oseni, 2015). Representatives heard about individuals bankrolling election campaigns and widespread instances of poll officials, party agents, and voters being bribed. In an environment of severe poverty, the temptations of buying and selling votes are likely inevitable (Olukotun, 2014).

Presidential elections were held in Nigeria on April 19, 2003. The outcome was a victory for the then incumbent Olusegun Obasanjo of the People's Democratic Party, who won his closest rival Muhammadu Buhari by about 11 million votes. Voter turnout was 69.1%. It was the first time in fifteen years that a civilian government would organize new elections in Nigeria. Although Obasanjo and his party are obvious favourites, he was accused of manipulating the ballot. Millions of people voted several times (*ThisDay*, 26th March 2003). International observers, including the European Union, uncovered different inconsistencies in 11 of the 36 Federal States. In this way, by and large, votes were pre-filled or results later altered (African Elections Database; *This Day*, 26th March 2003).

The media was in the forefront of agitations for electoral reforms, while reporting irregularities and malpractices that characterized the 2003 and 2007 elections; there was the call for immediate actions after elections (Omoera, 2010). While the 1999 elections were neither free nor fair, the 2003 general elections were characterized by fraud, rigging, miscounting and malfeasance. Additionally, the election was not issue-oriented; the political parties lacked well thought-out programmes and manifestos; the executive manipulated the other two arms

through disregard for ruling or threat of impeachment and blackmail (Momoh, 2006, as cited in Akubo and Yakubu, 2014).

On April 21, 2007, the 2007 general elections were held in Nigeria. Umaru Yar'Adua of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) won the election, which was characterized as highly controversial, and was eventually sworn into office on May 29. European Union election observers described the election as "the worst they had ever seen anywhere in the world." (*The Economist*, 19th April 2007), with "proliferating vote rigging, theft of ballot boxes, violence, and outright intimidation." The outgoing president Olusegun Obasanjo mentioned in a television interview that the election could not be described as perfect (BBC News, 20th April 2007). In fact, there was no good report about the elections. The conduct of the elections armed critical observers of the Nigerian political scene with weapons to portray the country in a bad light globally (Uhunmwbangho, 2008).

In the 2011 presidential elections, the struggle for the Nigerian presidency was between three main candidates and political parties (Olowojolu, 2016). The most prominent candidates were Goodluck Jonathan of People's Democratic Party (PDP); Muhammadu Buhari of Congress for Political Change (CPC); and Nuhu Ribadu of Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN).

The story of Jonathan's humble beginnings growing up poor caught the attention of millions of Nigerians throughout the media. Jonathan (as cited in Busari, 2012) narrated that:

In my early days in school, I had no shoes, no school bags, I carried my books in my hand but never despaired, no car to take me to school, but I never despaired. There were days I had only one meal, but I never despaired. I walked miles and crossed rivers to school every day, but I

never despaired. I didn't have power, didn't have generators, studied with lanterns, but I never despaired. Despite these, I finished secondary school, attended the University of Port Harcourt, and now hold a doctorate degree. Fellow Nigerians, if I could make it, you too can make it.

Goodluck Jonathan often shared his "grass to grace" story in his worldwide campaigns (Idumange, 2013) and actively engaged millions of Nigerian youth through Facebook and Twitter, bridging the communication gap that exists between the political leadership and the average Nigerian. General Muhammadu Buhari (Rtd.), who was Jonathan's closest rival, was portrayed in the media as a tough personality, an old-fashioned ex-military dictator and religious fundamentalist who could not lead a contemporary Nigeria. It was, therefore, not surprising that Jonathan emerged as the winner of that election in 2011.

2.4 Media coverage of the 2015 elections

The 2015 general elections, which was the fifth since 1999, was scheduled initially for 14th and 28th of February, but these dates later changed to 28th March and 11th April 2015 respectively. All 36 states held the presidential, federal parliament, and House of Assembly (state parliaments) elections, while gubernatorial polls were held in only 29 states. The elections marked a different turn in the history of Nigeria's democracy as registered voters set out to elect the next group of leaders into the presidential and National Assembly positions. It ended with the emergence of the opposition party, All Progressives Congress (APC), and its presidential candidate, taking the lead over the opposition party, People's Democratic Party (PDP) and its

candidate. This would be the first time an opposition party would unseat the ruling party since the transition to civil rule in 1999.

The 2015 general elections were a turning point in Nigeria's electoral history, as it was perceived by both local and international observers as reliable, transparent, free and fair – compared to previous elections (Animashaun, 2015). It should be noted that years and months before the election was conducted, there was increasing insecurity due to Boko Haram insurgency in the north-eastern part of the country; economic insecurity due to volatile oil prices; and continued corruption scandals in government. Former USA ambassador to Nigeria, John Campbell, predicted that Nigeria would disintegrate after the 2015 elections (Oluwarotimi, 2015). There was also the merger of major opposition parties, including the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), and a faction of All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) broke away to form All Progressives Congress (APC). Also, worthy of note was that General Muhammadu Buhari was accused by the opposition (PDP) of forging his secondary school certificate.

In all this, the print, broadcast and social media contributed in no small way to the outcome of the election. Most of the print media were in the forefront of observing the election season (Isola, 2014). The media was especially concerned with INEC's proposed budget of ₦93 billion to successfully execute the elections that year. *Daily Trust* first broke the story (14th April 2014). *Punch* (17th December 2013) had earlier published an article supporting a need for that amount of funding for election.

Voter registration is essential for political participation in a democracy. The turnout of Nigerians towards this exercise, which began in May 2014, has been attributed to the continuous

monitoring and information dissemination about the process by the media. The 2015 general election witnessed, for the first time, the use of Smart Card Reading machine (SCR) to electronically read the Permanent Voter's Card (PVC), which means that only voters with PVCs would be eligible to vote. By January 16, 2015, various publications in newspapers had reported the total number of registered voters as 68,833,476. As at February 27, 2015, a total number of 54,377,747 (78.93%) of the Permanent Voters Cards (PVCs) had been collected by their owners, across 36 states of the federation.

The success recorded in PVC collection could be majorly credited to live broadcasts on television and radio on the necessity of acquiring the card. An article published by *Daily Trust* (1st January 2015) had the caption "2015: Voter cards, registration and fear of disenfranchisement" and another one by *Daily Post* (2nd February 2015) had the caption "Yushau Shuaib: INEC and worrisome statistics on voters". All these stories and takes put INEC on their toes.

The media were utilized for electioneering campaign by politicians in the 2015 general elections to ensure that the electorate was provided information concerning the candidates, their background, parties' attributes, political agendas, and proposed plans and programmes. These campaigns were carried out through supported direct access spots, printed pamphlets, paid political advertising in newspapers, radio and television stations, televised debates, use of social media, and other mechanisms. Oboh (2015) suggests that "during the election campaign, party candidates met with the members of their constituencies to discuss the issues affecting the growth and development of their communities and how the candidates intend to solve the problems when elected into office." Many of the political parties and candidates during the 2015 general elections depended on newspapers for their campaign activities. It was reported that

regional newspapers did not use any sensational headlines, hate speech or incitement language during the campaign season (Arogundade, 2015). The PDP depended on federal-owned television and radio stations, as well as privately-owned ones such as AIT and STV, to broadcast and sell their campaign to the people; while the APC utilized the services of TVC, among other media outlets owned by APC stalwarts and governors, as its campaign platform.

Explaining the role, the mass media played in the 2015 general elections, Yaqub (2015) declared that, “In most cases [it was] was negative, condemnable, utterly and blatantly partisan as well as unpatriotic.” For him, the 2015 general elections were easily the most rancorous in the history of Nigeria as well as the most threatening to Nigeria’s territorial integrity.

According to the Nigerian Press Council (NPC) cited in Aghamelu (2008), the Nigerian media have been a victim of political manipulations from different powers such as government, proprietors and wealthy politicians, to the disadvantage of public interest. NPC added that Nigerians have witnessed the fallen standard of journalism as well as the ethnic polarization of media houses. They also declared that there has been an undue influence over the media and public information, especially in the political sector. Nevertheless, the emergence of social media, and subsequently news sites, has brought hope to masses, especially about accessibility and openness.

Nearly every political party and their candidates in the 2015 general elections used social media to campaign and garner voters’ support.

The impact of the media on the electoral process was felt more intensely on the election. The 2015 general elections, conducted on March 28, 2015 and April 11, 2015 was contested by 26 political parties, with only 14 of them fielding candidates for the presidential position. The

elections were keenly monitored by the media from the accreditation stage to voting and counting of ballots, up to the opening and closing times of the various polling centres. All these were reported in the media.

According to a study conducted by Olowojolu (2016), he established that the media performed a great job with covering events at the polling units and collation centres. Television stations such as Channels, AIT, TVC, NTA, and so on, devoted airtime during the day to broadcasting and analysing the election which was tagged #NigeriaDecides, #NigeriaDecides2015, #Nigeria2015PresidentialElectionsLiveUpdates, etc.

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and blogs were used to convey information and analysis to observers and agents. According to Oseni (2015), social media played a prominent role not only during the campaign but also during the electioneering process by making sure that the election's outcomes were made known to the public even before the official announcements were made by the INEC. Election results started trending on social media mere hours after the closure of voting which witnessed an obvious lead to the APC in the North-West, North-East, South-West and a tussle with PDP in the North-Central. It also revealed PDP's lead in the South-South and South-Eastern parts of Nigeria.

Despite the significant roles played by the media in ensuring transparent, credible, free and fair election, they were also confronted with a lot of challenges, some of which include unfair coverage and report of electoral process. They became a selfish and manipulating tool in the hands of self-centred and corrupt politicians, failing to carry out non-biased reporting and fair coverage in the campaigns of the candidates in the 2015 general elections. For instance, there was a documentary on AIT and STV targeting the personalities of the leading opposition

candidate, General Muhammadu Buhari (APC) and some ex-military persons. Also, Ekiti State governor, Ayodele Fayose sponsored one of the weirdest newspaper campaign ads in the front pages of *The Sun*, *Guardian* and *Punch*, warning the public not to give history a chance to repeat itself regarding the possibility of Buhari dying in office (Olowojolu, 2016).

Nigeria Democratic Report (2015) in a study titled, “Final Report on Media Coverage of 2015 Elections: A monitoring Scorecard of Print and Online Media”, noted that during the 2015 general election, the mass media gave more attention to conflict-related issues as against issues like voter’s education and early warning systems. This, in a way, explains the high tension during the 2015 presidential election, which made many people to travel long distances to their villages for fear of the unknown. Another study by International Press Council and Nigeria Press Council, titled “The Monitoring Report of Media Coverage of 2015 Elections for January 2015” showed that the media have shown commendable concern for the conduct of peaceful polls. They had given adequate attention to early warning signals on possible outbreak of violence especially on conflict issues and in conflict-prone areas. Nevertheless, they still published series of sensational headlines capable of igniting conflicts.

Scholars argue that the culture of imbalance and partisanship was introduced into the Nigerian media alongside the establishment of regional radio and television stations during the struggle for Nigeria’s independence (Adedeji, 1991, cited in Aghamelu, 2013). Ever since, political issues, trends, and events are often discussed based on the parochial and tribal interests or sentiments of the given medium’s analysts (Rasheed, 2016).

No doubt, the independence of the media is necessary for democracy to thrive, and so is the independence of the regulatory organizations ensuring its governance (Obikaeze & Udalla,

2015). However, during the 2015 election season, most of the newspapers such as the *Nigerian Tribune*, *Vanguard*, *The Sun*, seemed to have formed an alliance with the then ruling party, PDP, judging from their coverage of the election process, while *Nation*, among others, supported the opposition (now ruling party), APC (Nwammuo, Edegoh & Iwok, 2015). Federal-owned broadcast media such as NTA and FRCN, and privately-owned broadcast, including AIT and STV, were used to broadcast campaigns of defamation against the APC presidential candidate and leader, General Muhammadu Buhari and Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu respectively, while broadcast stations like TVC were used to propagate the programmes and campaign of the APC. According to Dr. Bakili Muluzi, Chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Group to Nigeria's 2015 election, "Many broadcast hours in television and radio stations and column inches in most newspapers and magazines devoted to the campaign were biased and personality-driven [...] Publicly-owned media platforms, especially broadcast media were clearly partisan [...] The flagship nightly television news on the NTA was completely dominated by reports of the incumbent party's campaign rallies." Many newspapers published "wrap advertisements" which looked like normal front pages, but were in fact paid-for advertising masquerading as news (Muluzi, 2015).

Kukah (2015) as cited in Akubo (2015, p7) posit:

The 2015 General elections have been turned into a theatre of hate speeches and campaigns coloured in a form that defies logic and common sense. Various politically motivated hate speeches about various candidates and especially the two leading Presidential candidates of the All Progressives Congress and the People's Democratic

Party have been bandied. I am sure if experts should collate analyses of contents of the social media this year, Nigeria will rank top because arguably more than 40 million young Nigerians who have since graduated and have no means of livelihood have found solace in the various social media platforms and are busy churning out divergent messages. The use of HATE SPEECHES in Nigeria preparatory to the coming general elections has become notorious to an extent that you would think and feel that sooner rather than later Nigeria may witness genocidal killings similar to what occurred in Rwanda some years back between the Hutus and Tutsis.

McNail (2011) noted that in this contemporary time, political communication is now negative, with attacks on political figures. This leads to counterattacks, which are now a dominant method in several campaigns. Agba (2006) believes everything about campaign reporting should serve as a guide to the electorate on what to do with their votes:

Informing the electorate does not mean telling them what the People's Democratic Party (PDP) plans to do for them or what decisions the Action Congress (AC) reached in their last convention, but thorough voter's guidance should be in the heart of campaign reporting by the media (Agba 2006, p. 200).

Okunna (1999) also shared this view, arguing that the media's coverage of issues during elections could make the electorate recognize certain issues as being more important than others, and this could influence audience decision about contesting candidates

In a different light, the media has played an indispensable role in the coverage of election. International Press Council and Nigeria Press Council examined media coverage of 2015 elections with conclusions that the media are the catalyst for a successful election. According to Pate (2011), the mass media has remained in the forefront of the struggle to promote the rights of the citizens through a credible election process. With the media, there is education and tension management for electorates. The media also provides a platform for candidates to meet the electorates. Oboh (2015) added that the media's coverage of elections increases information about available choices in candidates, stimulating interest in public involvement in the process. He further argued that the public depends on the media to provide sufficient information on the electoral process that would enable the people to carry out their civic responsibility in the elections.

2.5 Gaps in the literature

There have been many studies considering the media's role in electioneering campaigns, in shaping public perception of candidates, and, eventually, influencing election outcomes. In the earlier referenced study carried out by Aghamelu (2013), the role of the media in election was explored in a developmental context. In Temitope & Ahmad (2017) this role was explored even further by focusing on how the media's involvement in the electoral process leads to peaceful and fair outcomes at the polls. Another study carried out by Idi (2015) focused on the commitment of the media to providing useful information, which would enable the audience to make informed decisions at the polls. While Olalekan & Sam (2018) did not offer an opinion from

the results of their study and classification of political advertisements, their findings provide pointers for how this kind of communication in the media can influence voter decisions.

This dissertation shall fill in a gap in the existing body of knowledge in this area, not just around the 2015 elections as many other scholars have done, but specifically the presidential polls and the two major candidates running that year. This study focuses on the two major candidates, examining how they have been framed in the news during the election period.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Theoretical framework

3.1.1 Agenda-setting theory

The agenda-setting theory was pioneered during the 1968 general elections in America (McCombs, 1993), and it implies disseminating an issue to the public by bringing to the fore the media's own slant and prioritization of said issue, which in turn influences public perception, engagement and prioritization of the issue. Simply put, the audience will consider important issues the media considers important as well.

According to McQuail (2005), the term "agenda-setting" was coined by McCombs and Shaw (1972, 1993) to describe a phenomenon that had long been noticed and studied in the context of election campaign. This term explains the idea that the press indicates to the public what the

issues of the day are and such issues reflected are perceived by the public as the main issues of the day. Long and Lang, in their study of agenda setting in 1959, (as cited in Ayandiyi, 2000, p.20) postulated that:

In a sense, the newspaper is the prime mover in setting the territorial agenda. It has greater part in determining what most people will be talking about, what people will think the facts are, and what most people will regard as the way problems are to be dealt with. The mass media force attention to certain issues. They build up public images of political figure that are constantly representing objects suggesting what individual in the mass should think about, know about and have feelings about.

The media setting the agenda was also carried out under the Chapel Hill study, cited in Ayandiyi (2000, p.25):

Agenda setting came to represent the idea that there is a positive association between mass media coverage devoted to an issue and the placement of that issue on public agenda. Stated in casual terms, it urges that perceived importance of issues is influenced or caused by media coverage from a sample of one hundred respondents representing undecided voters in Chapel Hill, North Caroline and a content analysis of five newspapers and two magazines, McCombs and Shaw hypothesized that mass media set agenda for each political campaign, influencing the silence or attitudes towards the political issues.

The agenda-setting theory explains why and how people make an issue necessary or pivotal (Chafee & Berger, 1997). It is also prescient because it predicts the theory that if people are exposed to the media they will perceive the same issues are pivotal.

The agenda-setting theory “emphasises how the media set agenda of objects for attention and agenda of attributes for thinking about the objects” (McCombs & Ghanem, 2001, p.68). According to McCombs & Ghanem (2001), objects defining an agenda can be “political candidates, public institutions, or competing brands of goods.” Agenda-setting implies that the mass media pre-determine what issues are considered as important at a particular time in the society. This theory posits that the media influences and determines what people think about when they encounter media contents, especially on cultural, economic, political, and social issues. This is a “theory about the transfer of salience from the mass media pictures of the world to the pictures in our head” (McCombs, 2004, p.68).

The theoretical aspect of the study helps us to examine how the press agenda for 2015 general election issues has been carefully set by conferring them relative importance and examining the frequency and reliability of reporting them. This theory is quite limited because the audiences of mass media are highly heterogeneous in nature.

3.1.2 Framing theory

The classic work of Erving Goffman in 1974 on frame theory is the most appropriate theory for this study. The work titled “Framing analysis: An essay on the organization of experience” is often referred to as the initiation point of the framing theory. A method by which the mass media

promote a definition of an issue by means of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration is known as framing. However, when dealing with the news media, a news frame represents a tool of journalism which is used to tell a story when a journalist is limited by space, and it places an event within its broader context (Hallahan, 1999). Framing theory is used to explain the ways in which news content can be formulated and contextualized (McQuail, 2005).

Entman (1993) posits that framing has no general operational definition. He insists that it is a scattered conceptualization; this means that the term “framing” has attracted many definitions from different scholars. Due to the above assertion, other concepts such as *agenda setting* theory, *priming* theory have been associated with framing theory (McCombs, Shaw, & Weaver, 1997). Furthermore, framing can be considered either as a theory or an approach towards media content (Entman 2002; Druckman 2007; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

According to DeVreese (2007), framing theory is one of the media effects theories, generally used to examine how the media channels information and, consequently, impacts the public’s responses to an entire scope of outside stimuli. The way an issue or event is presented tends to affect the way it is seen and understood (Ajaero, 2014). What a framing research sets to do is to examine the construction of news stories, evaluate how these stories articulate certain frames, as well as how people interpret such frames (Carragee and Roefa, 2004). The framing approach in media studies can be compared to the psychological and sociological thinking that people need certain interpretative frames to be able to create an opinion or an evaluation about a particular matter (Carstea, 2012).

In communication research two methods exist by which framing can be studied these are individual frames and media frames (McQuail, 2005). These two frames can either be studied as a dependent variable or an independent variable (Chang, 2009).

Framing is a crucial process by which certain “political actors, such as government officials, exercise influence over each other and the public” (Oksanen, 2011, p.481). In stating that “there is no such thing as unframed information” (p325), Nisbet and Newman (2015) suggest how framing is such a huge part of communication and society. According to Ritzer and Goodman (2003, p363), “without frames, our world will be little more than several chaotic individual and unrelated events and facts.” The foundational framework for the framing theory is that, how an issue is portrayed in news reports can have an influence on how it is seen and understood by people (Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007). What this means is that using frames, several events can be perceived and understood by people in a given society. Baran and Swan (2007, p.13) consider media framing to involve “shaping the news we’re exposed to and the issues we think about. It can move people to vote against their best interests, buy products that are not good for them, and help dissolve boundaries separating facts, marketing, dogma and ideology.” Framing should be regarded as a process that enables *frame-building* first, then *frame-setting*, in a process that results in positive or negative outcomes (DeVresse, 2005). This study examined the type of frames employed by three newspapers in their reportage of the two major candidates of the 2015 presidential election.

Framing can be situated within media agenda and gatekeeping. Framing highlights that political issues can have several values from several perspectives. In communication, to frame is to “organise everyday reality by providing meaning to an unfolding strip of events” as well as

upholding “particular definitions and interpretations of political issues” (Chong & Druckman 2007, p.106).

In understanding the relationship between media houses, political actors and the public, frame theory is very significant. For instance, Tankard (2001) affirms that framing research can help one in understanding how the media works:

(1) that news framing can eliminate voices and weaken arguments, (2) that the media can frame issues in ways that favour a particular side without showing an explicit bias, and (3) that defining the terms of a debate takes one a long way toward winning it (Tankard, 2001, p.95)

He adds that framing can be differentiated from the concept of “objectivity and bias” in that it enables the likelihood of more complex emotional responses and contributes a “cognitive dimension” (beliefs about objects and attitudes), while identifying the “ability of text – or a media presentation – to define a situation, to define the issue and to set the terms of a debate” (Tankard, 2001, p.96).

A great deal of the power of framing comes from its ability to define problems – that is, articulating cost and benefits – identify causes, make moral assessments, and recommend necessary solutions (Entman 1993, 2010). Entman further argues that the communicators, the text, the receiver, and the culture (or the environment) all have a significant role to play in how frames occur in the communication process:

The communicators make conscious or unconscious decision in selecting what to say, guided by frames (called schemata) that organise their belief systems. The texts contain frames, which are manifested by the presence

or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgements (Entman, 1993, p.391).

Although the receiver can be influenced by other things than what is reflected in the text or the framing intention of the communicator, Entman believes that the common frames in the discourse and thinking of people have a huge influence on the text and the communicator. For example, the framing of a politician might include moral character, competence, experience and policy, and frames are used to create, more or less, positive or negative sentiments towards such a politician (Entman, 2010).

Framing occurs when the manner of events reported in the media has any form of impact on how such events are understood by the masses. Usually, it is common for mass media content producers to decide where and what to emphasise in any news story using certain phrases, images, positioning, and content type used. Framing assumes that how something is depicted in news reports can have an influence on how it is seen and understood by the masses (Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007). What this means is that the way information is presented (or framed) adds a determining factor to how people understand such information. The basis for this theory is that the media tend to pay more attention to certain issues and events, which are placed within a scope of meaning and interpretation to the masses (Baran & Dennis, 2009). The relevance of this theory to this study is that it explains how media coverage of an issue or event is a contributing factor in shaping the perception and opinion of the people.

3.2 Research design

To carry out this study effectively, the researcher will make use of the frame analysis to determine the quantity and slant of coverage of electoral issues and presidential candidates during the 2015 election.

A frame analysis is often used to study social constructions of reality. The term was coined in 1974 by sociologist Erving Goffman. This method has been chosen because it is appropriate for gauging the tone and coloration of media coverage of the elections to decipher the motives behind such a choice (ownership, etc.) and the effect on the electorate. Framing, as a concept, is related to the agenda-setting theory. The difference, though, is that the former focuses on the essence of the issues rather their popularity (Alawode & Adesanya, 2016).

The frame analysis will study news, features and opinion pieces that appeared in three major Nigerian papers, *The Punch*, *The Nation* and *Premium Times* between November 15, 2014 and February 12, 2015 – a period that represents 90 days of the 2015 election campaigns.

This researcher shall study the poll analysis of the newspapers during the campaign trail, slant of policy-based debates during the campaigns and media coverage of the credentials and qualities of the two leading candidates, Muhammadu Buhari and Goodluck Jonathan. The study will be carried out within the campaign period of the 2015 elections.

3.3 Study location

This research work will be carried out by analysing the content of three major Nigerian newspapers – *Punch*, *Nation*, and *Premium Times*.

3.4 Sampling technique

The newspapers will be selected using the purposive sampling technique. *The Punch*, *The Nation* and *Premium Times* have been selected for this study because of how incisive they are in reporting and analysing the news and politics, their wide coverage, and acceptance by the Nigerian people as credible, politically engaged mediums.

3.5 Method of data analysis

For this research, frequencies and simple percentages will be used to analyse the data collected. This is because the frame analysis requires recording the number of times the variables under study (each frame) appear in the newspapers under review. Frequency tables will be used to explain the number of times each variable appears, while simple percentages will be used to reflect the degree to which a variable is absorbed in the total variable measure (100%).

Chapter Four

Data Analysis and Interpretation

4.1 Introduction

In the words of Ezea (2015, p.5), "Since 1999, Nigerians have not witnessed a presidential poll [whose] prelude has generated much controversy, hate campaigns, tense atmosphere, intrigues, scheming, blackmail, mudslinging, allegations, divisiveness, bad blood, threats, inflammatory and unguarded utterances, [and] propaganda like the forthcoming poll which many see as a tight race between the two top contenders namely President Goodluck Jonathan of the Peoples 'Democratic Party (PDP) and General Muhammadu Buhari (Rtd) of the All Progressive Congress (APC)." Samuel (2016) highlights how the media depicts the two major candidates in line with stereotypical terms: while Buhari was portrayed as northerner, ascetic, militarist, jihadist; Jonathan was portrayed as a southerner, indolent, civilian, and religiously modest.

In the initial stages of the 2015 election campaign, three issues came to the fore, and they are security, corruption, and the economy. In the area of security, the Boko Haram insurgency, which started in 2009, had led to the extremist group occupying a huge area of territory in the north-east. This led to an increase in the number of deaths and the creation of more than one million internally displaced persons. For the issue of corruption, which has been a major problem for previous governments, the critics of the government accused it of failing to tackle the issue. In the aspect of economy, Nigeria is known to be one of the fastest growing economies in the world and is even said to be Africa's biggest economy. Nevertheless, there has been downfall by

more than 50 percent in global oil prices, which started to influence the economy as it led to a fall in the value of the national currency. The opposition party APC chose to capitalise on these issues to call for “Change”, while the ruling party’s supporters argued that despite security issues, the economy was thriving.

The campaign period was extensively and intensively covered by both print and broadcast media, sometimes to the virtual exclusion of news of other happenings both nationally and globally. Particularly, the issues which dominated foreign reporting of Nigeria – the insurgency in the northeast and the abductions by Boko Haram – got far less coverage domestically. Nevertheless, the campaign coverage was very varied, ranging from campaign reports and profiling of politicians, round-table discussions to phone-in programmes in the broadcast media as well as long editorials in the newspapers. There were also presidential and vice-presidential debates, organised by a group of broadcasters. The amount of press attention given to the campaign helped to generate and sustain public interest in the electoral process.

This chapter presents and discusses the findings from the analysis of the three selected newspapers in Nigeria: *The Punch*, *The Nation* and *Premium Times*. For clarity and easy assimilation, the data presentation was done on tables, graphs and simple percentage scores. The instrument used in gathering data for this study is the code sheet. The units of analysis for this study are mainly news stories, features, editorials and letters-to-the-editor, and opinion articles, on the 2015 Presidential elections. The frequency of the news stories in this study reveal the media’s influence, particularly during elections.

4.2 Tabular Presentation of Data

Table 1: Number of Stories on each Candidate:

Item	Goodluck Jonathan			Muhammadu Buhari			Total
	<i>The Punch</i>	<i>The Nation</i>	<i>Premium Times</i>	<i>The Punch</i>	<i>The Nation</i>	<i>Premium Times</i>	
Number of stories about each candidate	147	63	108	110	57	104	587

Table 1 shows that there are more news stories on the PDP’s candidate, Goodluck Jonathan. This is not surprising as he was the incumbent president. The media paid more attention to him, assessing his leadership so far. By doing this, they ended up inadvertently identifying the flaws in his administration, which the opposing party capitalised on to push forward their candidate as the solution that Nigerians needed.

Table 2: Slant of Opinion/Feature Pieces on Each Candidate

For this, items are coded according to how they reflect on individual actors or parties. Indicators of a predominant *negative tone* towards a particular candidate are mentions of individual failure, accusations of incompetence, allegations of misconduct, attacks, disaster, charge of wrongdoing,

crises, criticism, fiasco, frustrations, collapse, defeat, deterioration, disdain, flop, neglect, rejection, resignation, scandal, mistrust, and negative traits. Indications of predominant *positive tone* toward a candidate are mentions of individual victory, advance, achievement, accomplishment, commendations, competence, compliments, esteem, improvement, portrayal of merit, problem solutions, prosperity, success, triumph, trust, and positive traits. If a report does not have any indication of *negative* or *positive* tone towards any particular candidate, it is coded as “neutral”.

Newspapers	Negative towards Goodluck Jonathan	Negative towards Muhammadu Buhari	Positive towards Goodluck Jonathan	Positive towards Muhammadu Buhari	Neutral	Total
<i>The Punch</i>	146 (57%)	31 (12%)	26 (10%)	36 (14%)	18 (7%)	257 (100%)
<i>The Nation</i>	64 (53%)	0 (0%)	10 (8.4%)	43 (36%)	3 (2.6%)	120 (100%)
<i>Premium Times</i>	93 (44%)	36 (17%)	15 (7%)	25 (12%)	43 (20%)	212 (100%)

Table 2 shows that news coverage was significantly more negative towards Goodluck Jonathan than Muhammadu Buhari. Based on the data in the table above, stories show negativity towards Goodluck Jonathan than towards his opposition – Muhammadu Buhari. Also, positive stories were higher towards Muhammadu Buhari than Goodluck Jonathan. The *Punch* had 57% negative

towards Goodluck Jonathan and 12% towards Muhammadu Buhari. Also, *The Nation* has 53% stories framing negativity towards Goodluck Jonathan, while it has 0% negative stories towards Muhammadu Buhari; and has 36% positive towards Muhammadu Buhari against only 8.4% towards Goodluck Jonathan. Given that the newspaper is owned by a staunch APC national leader, Asiwaju Bola Tinubu, this result is not shocking. *Premium Times* has 44% negative stories towards Goodluck Jonathan against 17% for Muhammadu Buhari.

News outlets frame negativity by highlighting political failure, crises, cynicism, defeatism, disappointment disaster, fiasco, frustration, incompetence, threat, and/or misconduct (Lengauer et al. 2011). Framing negativity in the media can be in-house (endogenous negativity, which is when the negativity has been initiated by the media) or by political actors (exogenous negativity, which is when the media distribute negative news). During electioneering campaigns, Opeibi (2006) assert that “many of the candidates abandoned positive, issue-focused, image-building political adverts for negative attacks on their opponents” (p.1).

In this light, the *Nation* focused more on projecting the APC presidential candidate and making him more acceptable to voters rather than framing negativity in general. While trying to maintain objectivity and professionalism, news outlets tend to slant much more favourably towards PDP or APC, left or right, liberal or conservative. Aside from news events (such as campaigns, meetings and rallies) and press releases, the media can pay more attention to opinion articles in favour of a particular candidate or publish news stories from other media organisations that portray some negativity towards an opposing candidate. The data in the table above suggests this was the case with the *Nation*.

Table 3: Race Frame

Item	Goodluck Jonathan			Muhammadu Buhari			Total
	<i>The Punch</i>	<i>The Nation</i>	<i>Premium Times</i>	<i>The Punch</i>	<i>The Nation</i>	<i>Premium Times</i>	
Number of reports about candidates' performance in the race (Race frame)	7	5	6	7	7	6	38

Table 3 shows that there seems to be less focus on the performance of candidates in the race. The media focused on other issues such as corruption in the Nigerian system and the need for a government opposed to corruption.

Table 4: Story genres employed by the newspapers in their reportage of the 2015 Presidential elections

Story Genre	Goodluck Jonathan			Muhammadu Buhari			Total	Percentage (%)
	<i>The Punch</i>	<i>The Nation</i>	<i>Premium Times</i>	<i>The Punch</i>	<i>The Nation</i>	<i>Premium Times</i>		
Straight News	95	42	82	70	30	69	388	65.9%
Features	35	10	15	25	11	17	113	19.2%
Editorial	5	2	3	4	3	2	19	3.2%
Opinion Articles	10	7	7	9	10	15	58	9.8%
Letters-to-the-Editor	2	2	1	2	3	1	11	1.9%
Total	147	63	108	110	57	104	589	100%

Table 4 shows that most stories on the 2015 Presidential candidates were written using the straight news format (65.9%) with features following at 19.2%, while opinion articles have 9.8%. Editorial and Letters-to-the-Editor fall short with 3.2% and 1.9% respectively. Based on the data in the table above, it is obvious that the media basically reported what happened during campaigns, and what people said about the contesting candidates.

4.3 Framing Analysis of Selected Newspapers

The researcher placed special attention on certain other themes such as hate speeches and insults, promises, the use of threats, campaigns, PDP and Jonathan's prominence, APC and Buhari's prominence, religious interests, ethnic interests, as well as fights and war of words.

There is frequent use of hate speeches and insults as each party and its presidential candidate try to highlight the faults and weaknesses of the opposing part and its candidate. The number of hate speeches on the pages of the selected newspapers was a total of 60 items.

Promises were made by the candidates to win over the interests of the people, and acquire their votes. Several the promises are made based on the agenda set by the media, to influence the decision of the voters. Promises appeared 34 in the selected newspapers.

The use of threats can be seen in politics. It is not uncommon to find the use of wrong information to create fear in the minds of the public and even candidates in order to discourage the masses from performing their civil duties during elections. In doing this, a targeted candidate may be hindered from ascending to a particular political office. The frequency of threats gathered is 84 times.

The media helps in the promotion and coverage of campaigns. The frequency of campaign occurrence in the media plays a major role when it comes to determining who gains more popularity among the masses. Campaign recorded from the selected newspapers in this study appeared 77 times.

Political parties are known to always express their ideas, manifestos, opinions, and views, while doing all it takes to attract voters and gain their votes. In this light, the study will also discuss the prominence of the two major parties' flag bearers, which are Goodluck Jonathan of the

People's Democratic Party and Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressives Congress. As recorded in the data collection process, the occurrence of APC and its presidential aspirant was 97 times, while that of the People's Democratic Party was 122 times.

In Nigeria, and several other countries, religious interest is a serious concern to the country. In fact, history has shown religious fanatics abusing the privileged of worship and committing acts of terrorism and intimidation. In this light, most people want to be certain that they are voting for will be able to protect their rights to worship, as well as benefit their welfare. Without doubt, a connection exists between religion and politics, especially in Nigeria. Although the role that religion plays in politics is still debatable, the connexion between the two concepts has been recognised for a long time (Falana, 2010). With religion being an important factor in political discourse (Adigwe and Grau, 2007), the Nigerian politics is characterized chiefly by the "politicization of religion and religionization of politics" (Adogame, 2006). In addition, it was observed that "no one can aspire to, or hold political office in Nigeria without pretending to be religious" (Kukah, 1993). Invariably, religion goes together with politics, and it will be difficult to hold a public office without holding on to religion. Politicians make use of the power entrenched in religion, not just to achieve a particular aim, but also to subdue their opponents as well as to legitimize their religion. It is not surprising that the major religious groups in Nigeria (Islam and Christianity) have been in a brutal battle for the political control of the country (Bujra, 2006).

In 2015, the issue of religious interest occurred 19 times.

Ethnic interest comes to the fore in public interest as it is generally believed that good representation of a community will foster the growth and development of the represented community. Therefore, it is not uncommon that citizens want the interests of their communities

to be met by going for someone with some ethnic affiliation. Hence, this study also focuses on ethnic interest, which has a frequency of 17 times.

Fights tend to occur during elections alongside wars of words. All these are usually captured in the reporting of newspapers. It has a reasonable amount of frequency, and this drew the researcher's attention to it. It occurred 79 times.

Table 5: Hate Speeches/Insults

Newspapers	Frequency	Percent %
<i>The Punch</i>	14	23.3
<i>The Nation</i>	30	50
<i>Premium Times</i>	16	26.7
Total	60	100.00

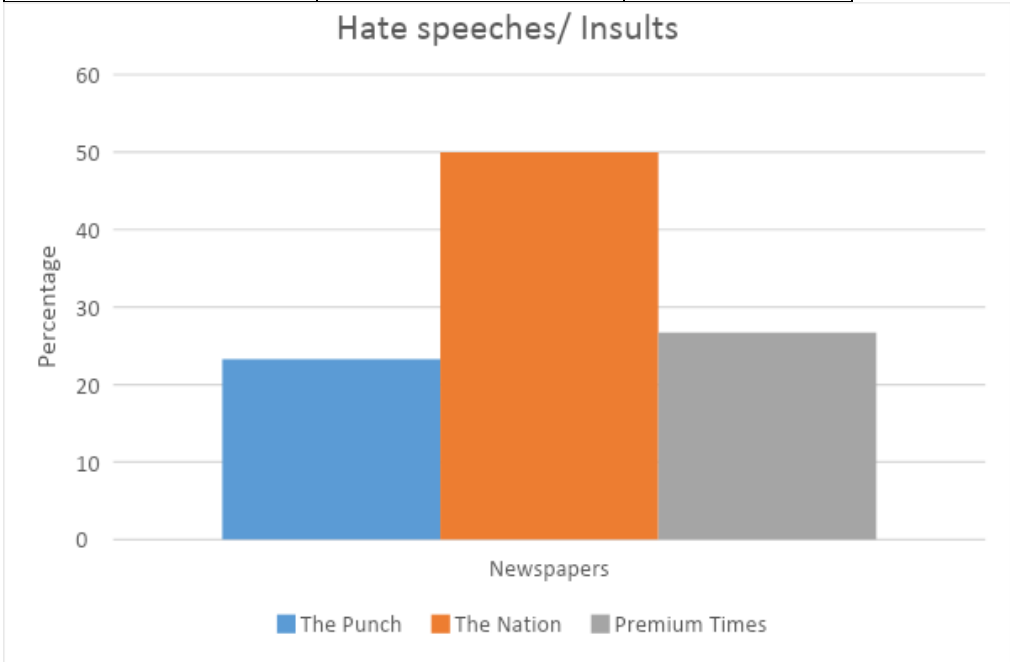


Figure 1: Hate Speeches/Insults

Table 5 reveals Hate Speeches/Insults expressed by the selected newspapers from November 15, 2015 – February 12, 2015. *The Nation* Newspaper had the highest, while *Punch* and *Premium Times* had considerable low rates of hate speeches and insults. An example is the death wish advert that was sponsored by Governor Ayo Fayose of Ekiti State on *The Punch* (January 19, 2015) captioned, “NIGERIANS BE WARNED!”

Table 6: Promises

Newspapers	Frequency	Percent %
<i>The Punch</i>	20	28.6
<i>The Nation</i>	30	42.9
<i>Premium Times</i>	20	28.6
Total	70	100.00

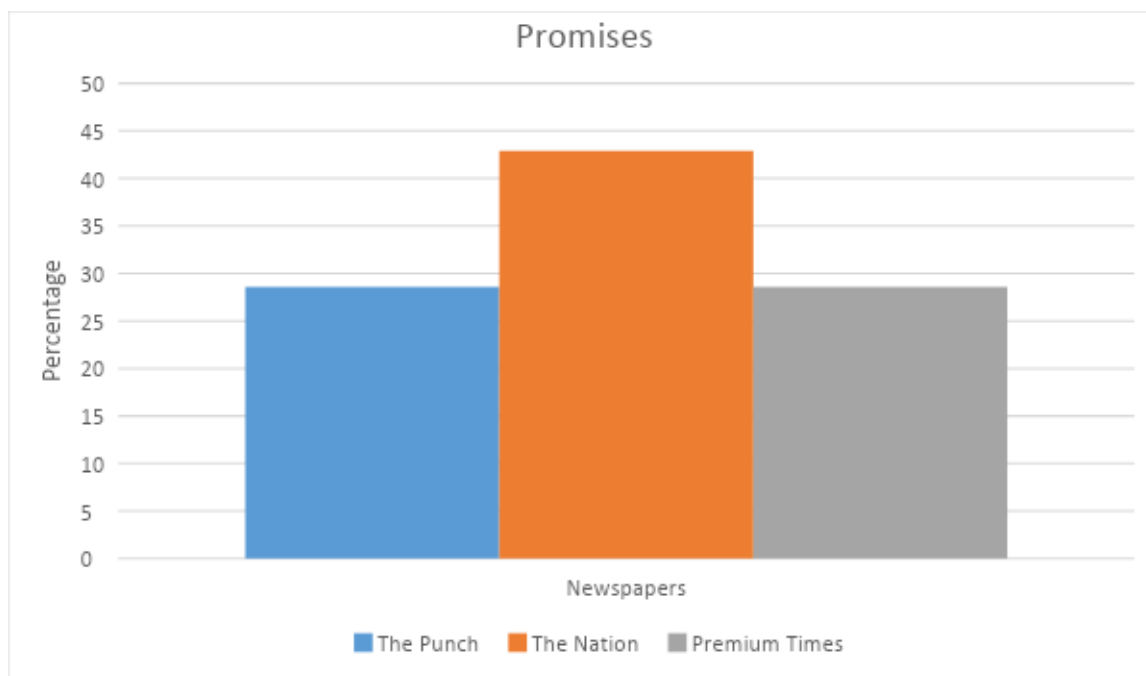


Figure 2: Promises

Table 6 reveals the Promises expressed by the selected newspapers from November 15, 2015 – February 12, 2015. *The Punch* and *Premium Times* Newspaper had the lowest promises by 28.6%, made by the presidential candidates, Buhari and Jonathan and their political parties frequency.

Table 7: The Use of Threats

Newspapers	Frequency	Percent %
<i>The Punch</i>	14	21.8
<i>The Nation</i>	40	62.5
<i>Premium Times</i>	10	15.6
Total	64	100.00

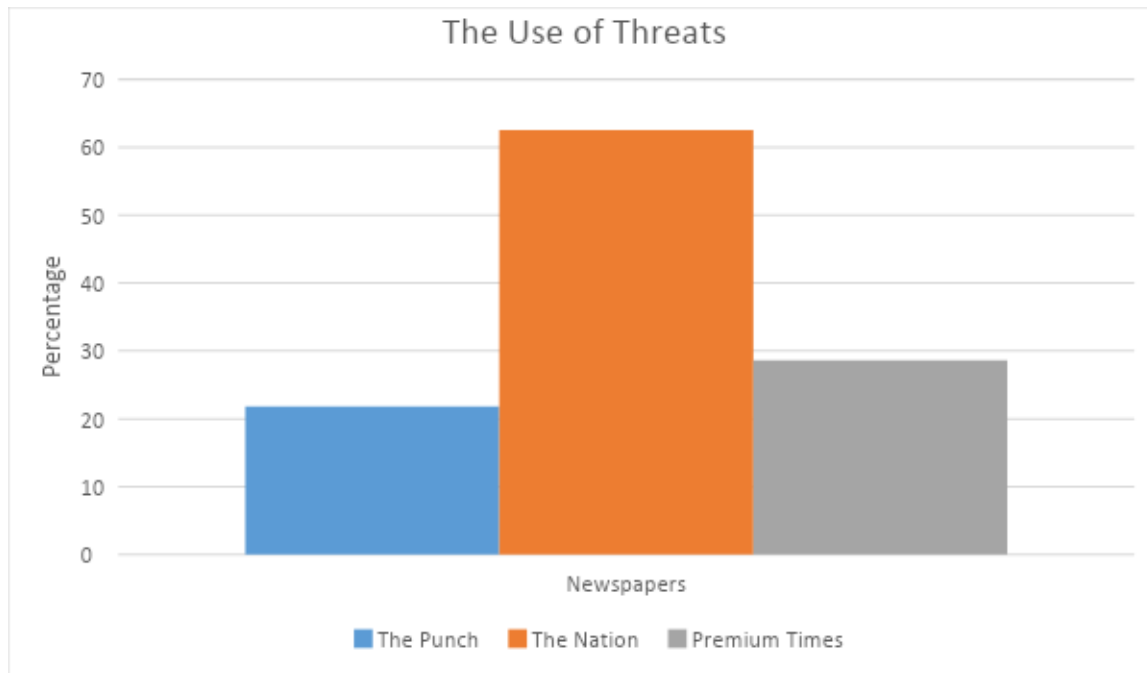


Figure 3: The Use of Threats

Table 7 reveals threats expressed by the selected newspapers from November 15, 2015 – February 12, 2015. *The Nation* Newspaper had the highest frequency of threats with 62.5%, followed by *Punch* with 21.8%. An example of threat can be seen in “...PDP to procure Court judgment to stop Buhari” (*Premium Times*, January 29th, 2015).

Table 8: Campaigns

Newspapers	Frequency	Percent %
<i>The Punch</i>	35	43.8
<i>The Nation</i>	25	31.3
<i>Premium Times</i>	20	25%
Total	80	100.00

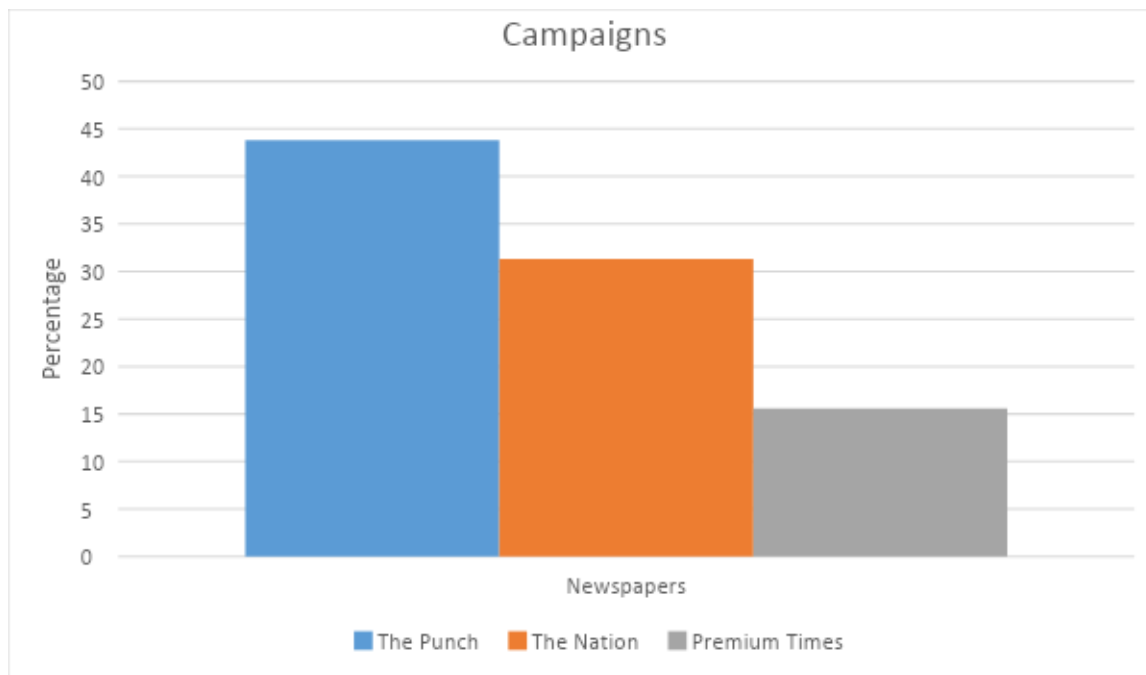


Figure 4: Campaigns

Table 8 reveals the Campaigns expressed by the selected from November 15, 2015 – February 12, 2015. *Punch* newspaper was seen to have carried the greater frequency of reports on

campaigns conducted by the two presidential candidates and their political parties. *Punch* led with 43.8% rate of campaign report. Some of which are “Jonathan Kaduna Rally, Police chase pro-Buhari crowd out of Stadium, Parties pay supporters N2, 000 each to attend rallies” (*Sunday Punch* February 1, 2015), “Angry youths pelt Jonathan’s convoy with stones in Taraba” (*The Punch* January 30, 2015), “Jonathan, Amaechi lock horns over Rivers Stadium, Soldiers take over stadium for PDP campaign; APC rally bombed in Patience Jonathans LGA” (*Sunday Punch* January 25, 2015). “Youths stone Jonathan’s convoy in Katsina State” (*The Punch* January 21, 2015) “Jonathan defies INEC, deploys presidential Jets for campaign” (*Sunday Punch* January 18, 2015).

Table 9: PDP and Jonathan Prominence

Newspapers	Frequency	Percent %
<i>The Punch</i>	50	41
<i>The Nation</i>	30	24.6
<i>Premium Times</i>	42	34.4
Total	122	100.00

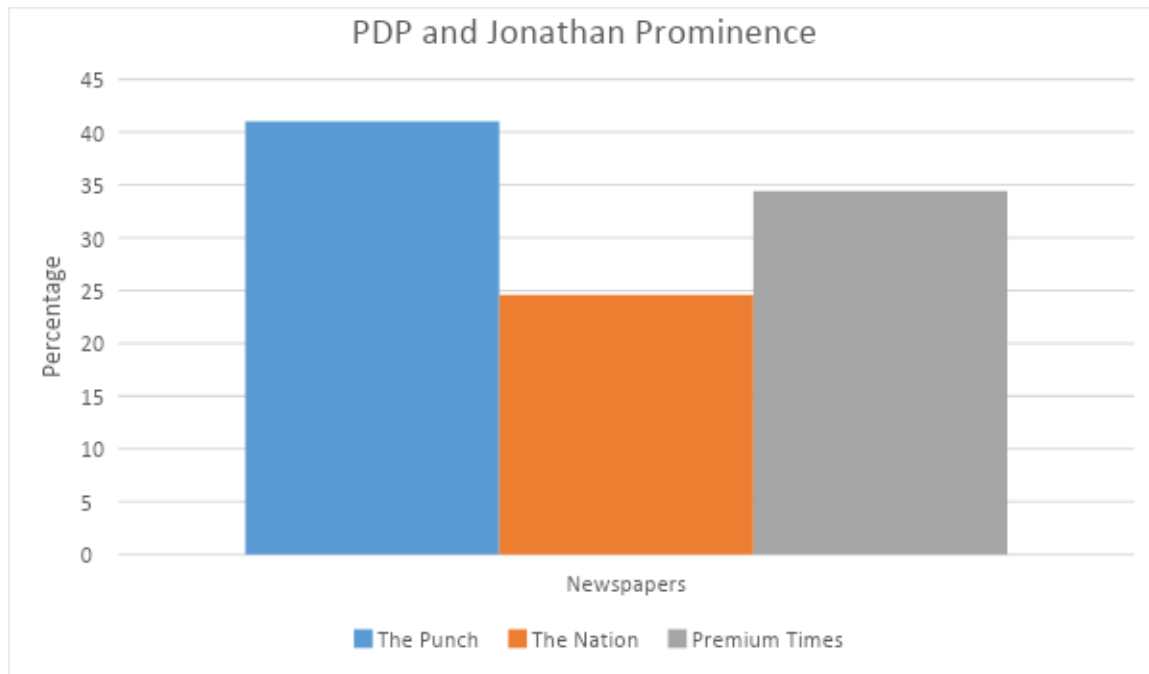


Figure 5: PDP and Jonathan Prominence

Table 9 reveals the PDP and Jonathan’s prominence expressed on the selected newspapers from November 15, 2015 – February 12, 2015.

The Nation Newspaper had the lowest frequency while *Punch* had the highest frequency of PDP and Jonathan’s Prominence reported in 2015. *Punch* had 41% in reporting of events concerning Jonathan and the People’s Democratic Party, while *The Nation* had 24.6% reports. Some of these reports amongst many others are as follows: “N21bn not for Jonathan’s campaign alone”-PDP”, “Obasanjo meets women leaders, blasts Jonathan” (*The Punch* January 6, 2015); “Suicide bombers strikes near Jonathan’s rally venue”, “Three die at PDP Campaign in A’Ibom” (*The Punch* February 3 2015); “Jonathan lacks will to crush B’Haram, Buhari tells Kerry” (*The Punch* January 27, 2015).

Table 10: APC and Buhari Prominence

Newspapers	Frequency	Percent %
<i>The Punch</i>	30	30.9
<i>The Nation</i>	40	41.2
<i>Premium Times</i>	27	27.8
Total	97	100.00

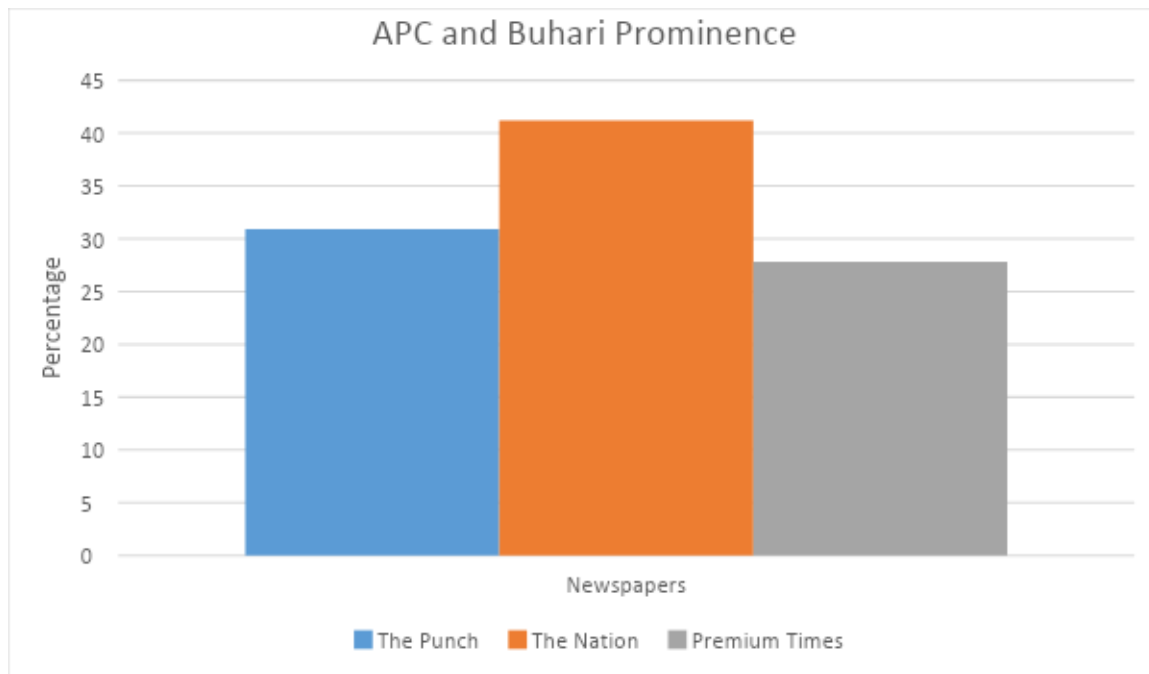


Figure 6: APC and Buhari Prominence

Table 10 reveals the APC Political party and Buharis’s prominence in the reporting of events in the presidential elections as expressed by the selected newspapers from November 15, 2015 – February 12, 2015. *The Nation* newspaper has shown to be the highest in frequency of reports with 41.2%.

Table 11: Religious Interests

Newspapers	Frequency	Percent %
The Punch	8	42.1
The Nation	4	21.1
Premium Times	7	36.8
Total	19	100.00

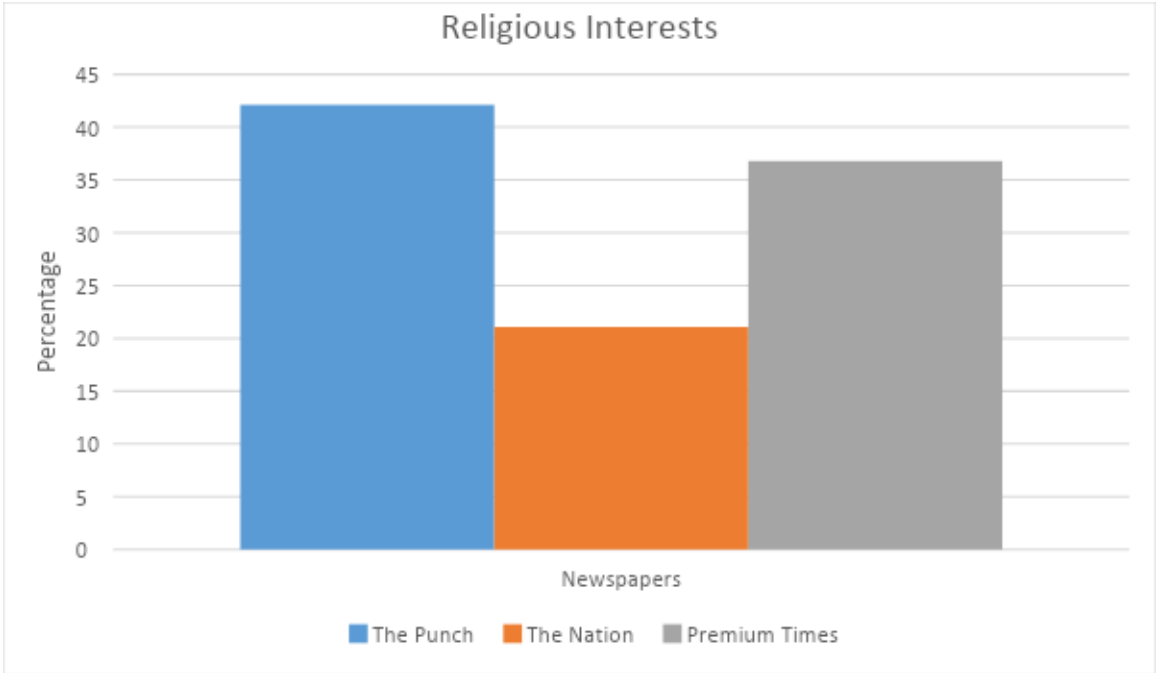


Figure 7: Religious Interests

Table 11 reveals the religious interests expressed by the selected newspapers from November 15, 2015 – February 12, 2015. *The Nation* had the lowest frequency in religious interests reported in 2015 newspapers. While *Punch* had the highest. There was the use of platforms and meetings to campaign and convince religious groups into getting their votes.

Table 12: Ethnic Interest

Newspapers	Frequency	Percent %
The Punch	6	35.3
The Nation	6	35.3
Premium Times	5	29.4
Total	17	100.00

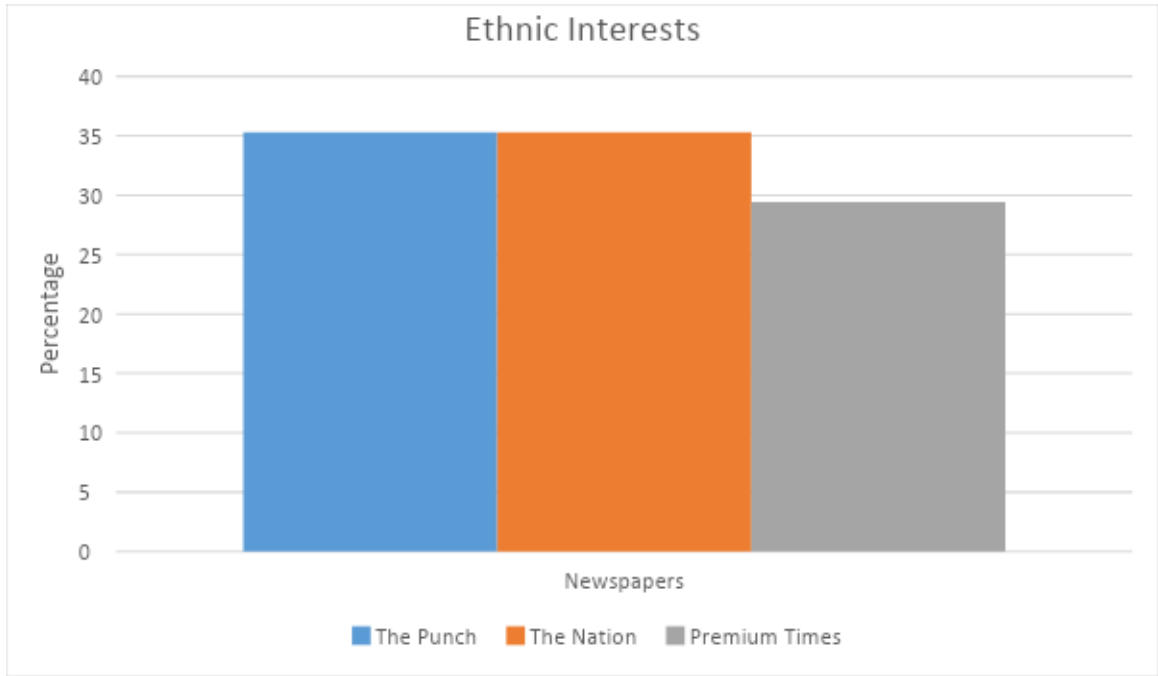


Figure 8: Ethnic Interests

Table 12 reveals the ethnic interests expressed by the selected newspapers from November 15, 2015 – February 12, 2015.

The Punch and *The Nation* Newspapers were discovered to have the highest, while *Premium Times* had the lowest both.

Table 13: Fights / War of Words

Newspapers	Frequency	Percent %

<i>The Punch</i>	25	50
<i>The Nation</i>	15	30
<i>Premium Times</i>	10	20
Total	50	100.00

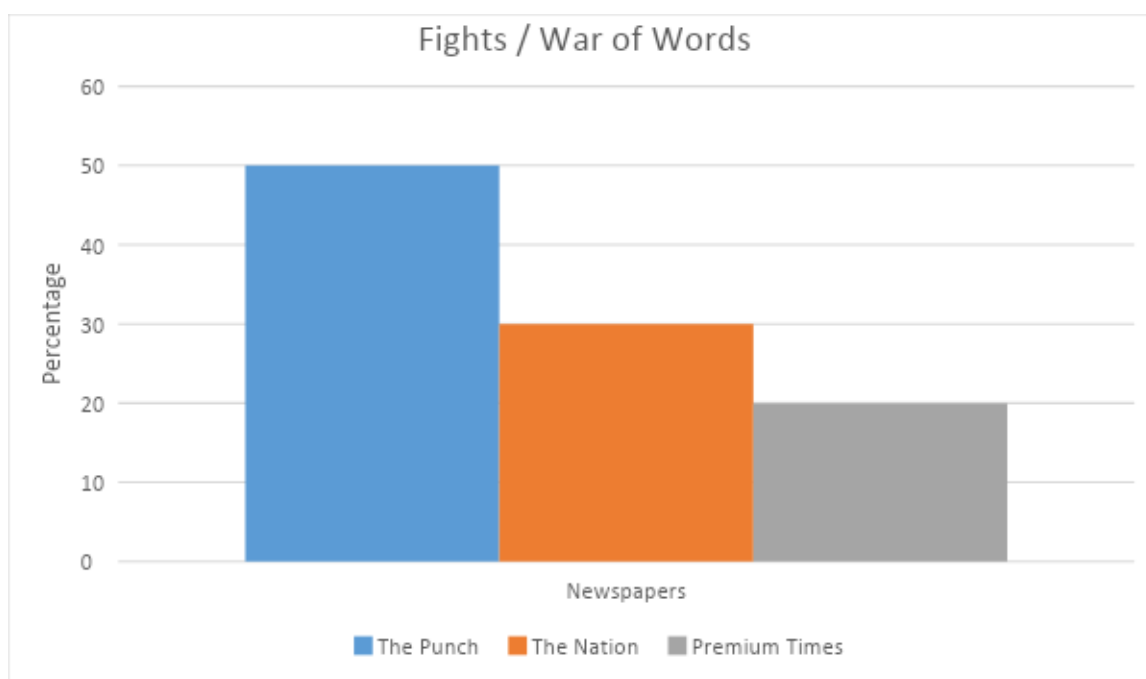


Figure 9: Fights / War of Words

Table 13 reveals the fights and war of words expressed by the selected newspapers from November 15, 2015 – February 12, 2015. *Premium Times* Newspaper recorded the lowest frequency while *The Punch* had the highest frequency of fights and war of words reported in 2015. Some of these reports include “I won’t fight graft by putting people in crates” –Jonathan, “Nigeria won’t break up, says US (*The Punch* January 9, 2015).

4.4 Ownership Structure of Selected Newspapers

According to Altschull's theory of media ownership, the "content of the news media always conforms to the interests of those who finance the press" (McQuail, 2005, p. 291). Newspapers owned by politicians often pay attention to the coverage of political events in order to protect the interests of their financiers, while those owned by non-politicians covered more of economic related stories because their financiers are more interested in business-related stories and profit-making. This position supports Griffin's (2000) view that media products reflect the preferences of the dominant power structures.

The outcome of the study of Shoemaker and Reese (1991) supports this theory, proving that media content reflects the interests of those who fund the media. This outcome is in contrast with the position of Lacy (1991), who reported that ownership have no effect on how news space is allocated.

An attempt to prove this theory is also done in this study. Based on the data gathered above, it is obvious that the papers used their reports in favouring or disfavouring political interests of their owners, aiming to influence readers' votes for its preferred candidates while castigating the opposing candidates.

4.5 Findings and Discussion of Result

This study focused on an investigation of how the media captured two major presidential candidates during the 2015 Nigerian elections. The researcher analysed the themes/frames that dominated the media landscape during the 2015 presidential elections. Although there were 14

candidates who contested the election, only two – Jonathan and Buhari – were popular. Other contestants were Sen. Tunde Anifowose-Kelani (AA), Rafiu Salau (AD), Alh. Ganiyu O. Galadima (ACPN), Ayeni Musa Adebayo (APA), Chief Sam Eke (CPP), High Chief Ambrose N. Albert Owuru (HOPE), Comfort Oluremi Sonaiya (KOWA), Chief Martin Onovo (NCP), Allagoa Kelvin Chinedu (PPN), Godson Mgbodile Ohaenyem Okoye (UDP) Chief (Dr.) Chekwas Okorie (UPP), and Dr. Mani Ibrahim Ahmad (ADC). The frequency of coverage given to the candidates attest to the fact that the media focused on just two major candidates. A total of 589 articles were harvested from the three different newspapers studied.

In evaluating political actors during electioneering period, it seems that there is more attention is paid to “bad times” than “good times”. Conflict and negativity predominantly feature in debates within the political communication arena, and have, therefore, become key news values (Vliegthart et al., 2011). The framing of conflicts and incapability towards political actors or institutions can be seen as approach through which news media can implicitly create attributes for evaluating politicians. When there is focus on a candidate’s personal characteristics, such as success or failure, there seems to be a more likelihood to attract a larger audience (Iyengar et al., 2004).

As more journalists’ attitudes towards politics and politicians become more cynical, conflict has become a significant part of news reporting (Patterson, 2009). Patterson further argues that such attitudes tend to activate the journalist’s search for oppositional and *conflictual* information with less concern about the extent to which such criticism can be justified. In addition, it is obvious that news stories that reflect incapability outweighs capability in the coverage of Nigerian 2015 Presidential election. The incapability frame was significant toward

Goodluck Jonathan than Muhammadu Buhari. Based on this, *The Nation* ultimately focused on attributes that promoted the APC candidate while presenting negativity towards Goodluck Jonathan. Although *Premium Times* and *Punch* showed some level of positivity towards Goodluck Jonathan, they were predominantly negative towards the incumbent president. Basically, we find that Goodluck Jonathan ultimately had more negative reports than Muhammadu Buhari.

The manner, trend, and language of the frequency of newspaper reporting within in 2015 was filled with hate speeches and insults, promises, threats, campaigns, and so on. Ethnic interests were reported prominently, coupled with religious interests and records of fighting and explosions. That is why the analysis revolves around these frames.

The prevailing story genre was the direct news stories. This is because the media were updating people on the activities of various political parties. A number of the issues raised in the direct news reports were then explained in the feature stories. According to Young (2011), because of the reporter's need to have a new story daily on the campaign trail as well as the need to compete for the attention of readers, campaign coverage often becomes less issue focused and more focused on "who's ahead and who is behind" as a campaign progresses.

The motive of a media organization giving more attention to certain issues in the society to the detriment of others conforms to the theoretical framework of this study; which are Agenda Setting and Framing Theory. McCombs and Shaw (1972) posit that the agenda setting theory can give attention to an issue in the society through quantity or frequency of reporting. This is corroborated by Chomsky and Herman (2010) that the political economy theory influences media content since the ownership of the media is highly concentrated among a few dozen of the class of the "haves" for commercialization. This shows that one newspaper can give more attention to

a particular issue than another. This is done through framing. Mchakulu (2011) argues that frames are deliberately designed by political institutions or their agents to be used publicly, distributed widely, and reported often by those that are obviously associated with one political party or the other. It is crucial to note that media ownership and political inclination often determine the type of themes that dominated reports on contesting candidates. *The Nation*, owned by a chieftain of the APC, focused on reports that were favourable to the APC party's cause. This concurs with the explanation on frames presented above by Mchakulu (2011).

A report from Zafar (2013) revealed that newspapers in Pakistan have the same policy for different political parties in terms of more space, frequency, placement and more favourable slant. Correspondingly, Chris (2002) study shows that in Japan, readers of the major quality newspapers are well served in terms of being exposed to a considerable amount of substantive coverage of the election campaign. Additionally, D'Alessio and Allen (2000) found that newspapers, reporters and editors may have their ideological bias in the coverage of presidential campaigns, but such bias has insignificant influence on the net coverage of candidates.

However, since the findings of this study acknowledged that in the 2015 presidential election there were disparities among the national newspapers in the coverage of politics, one might be quick to say that, it may be as result of what Fidelis (2014) posits that the greatest challenge of the Nigerian media during election are the proprietors who are mostly persons with political interests. As such, they could discourage the media from adhering to the fundamental principles of balance and objectivity. Also, Abass (2012) posits that media are hampered by some factors namely: ownership, political party affiliation, ideological differences and regional differences. Also, Galadima and Enighe (2001) observed that the Nigerian press is always used by

their owners, both the private and government, for the propagation of the interest of such owners, especially in the struggle to gain power or monopoly. Similarly, Edogbo (1994:33) citing Grant (1991) in Daramola (2013), states that most newspapers often speak for one political party or one region against another, which means that the press acts not as an impartial estate, but as a mouthpiece of the political divisions in Nigeria. Likewise, Brown and Udomisor (2015) findings show that whenever the Nigerian media decides to report political issues, it is mostly tailored towards government's interests. As such, Fidelis (2013) believes that because of this constraint, the media's social responsibility is curtailed during the coverage of politics and elections.

Among the frames discussed are ethnic and religious interests. The issue of ethnicity and religion were evident in news reports as there were opinions about Buhari as a Fulani and a Muslim. In order to appeal to the religious sensitivity of Nigerians, in a country in which, ethnicity still plays a major role in who people choose to elect, the running mate of General Buhari was a Christian, and this was a smart strategy to appeal to both the northern and southern parts of the country. In the area of ethnicity, while Muhammadu Buhari is Hausa/ Fulani from the North, Goodluck Jonathan is Ijaw from the South. It is, therefore, not surprising that Goodluck Jonathan won overwhelmingly in the South-South and South-East regions, while Buhari got most of his votes from the North.

This study attests to the fact that the media paid more attention to the candidates' character rather than their manifestoes. This can be found in several articles published in the studied newspapers as the person of Goodluck Jonathan and Muhammadu Buhari was more talked about than their policies. For instance, Buhari talked about "change," without any specific reference to what this change would bring, while Jonathan's team advocated "continuity and

transformation” without stating clearly the policies that would drive this. The findings of this study align with that of Carstea’s (2009) study, which affirms that the media focused on secondary themes that are associated with the candidates’ conducts and characters rather than their political policies. O’gara (2009) echoed same in his study when he found that the media continue to place greater importance on candidate’s image and viability than on policy issues. For instance, Buhari was majorly portrayed as an incorruptible man that would end corruption, without any mention of his policies.

The focus on character contrasts the findings of a study by Benoit and Klyukovski (2006), who in a study of the Ukrainian 2006 presidential election found that *policy* was the most common theme of coverage more often than *character*. Also, Klein and Maccoby (1954) cited in Peter (2012) investigated newspaper coverage of the 1952 presidential contest and found that 60 percent of stories concerned *policy*. Stempel and Windhauser (1991) also analysed the content of newspaper coverage of the 1984 United States’ presidential campaigns in 1984. *Policy* had the highest consisting of 39 percent of stories. In the same vein, Mantler and Whiteman (1995) reported that in 1992, *policy* came first comprising of 49.5 percent of newspaper coverage. Similarly, Just, Crigler and Buhr (1999) found that 70 percent of newspaper campaign stories in 1992 concerned *policy*. Moreover, the study of Chris (2002) shows that *Policy* received the lion’s share of election coverage in Japan.

The findings of this study also disagree with Peter (2012) who revealed that *advocacy* was the most common topic of election coverage. Also, Benoit, Stein and Hansen (2005) found out that the most common theme of campaign coverage was *horse race* (40%) followed by *candidates’ character* (31%) and then discussion of *candidates’ policy positions* (25%). According

to Peter (2012) citing Russonello & Wolf (1979) 56 percent of newspaper coverage focused on the *horse race*, 22 percent was about *policy*, and 17 percent dealt with the *candidate's character*. Similarly, Robinson and Sheehan (1983) investigated news coverage of the 1980 United States' presidential campaign from January to October and found over double more space devoted to *horse race* than to *issues*. Stovall (1982) analysed the same campaign and concluded that *horserace* made up 86% of newspaper coverage in 1980 and the remaining 14% about *issues*. Sigelman and Bullock (1991) in their investigation of presidential campaign coverage of five newspapers, sampling every 20 years from 1888 to 1988, they found that *candidate's character* maintained a somewhat steady coverage of about 10 percent while *policy* issues comprised about 25 percent coverage. *Campaign events* accounted for about 40 percent of stories. Comparing news coverage of election campaigns in Swedish and United States newspapers, Stromback and Dimitrova (2006) found that the United States papers emphasized *horse race* more than political strategy frames. This perhaps is why Overholser and Jamieson (2006) asserted that the agenda setting theory plays an important part in shaping political reality. This is because readers learn not only about a given issue, but also how much importance to attach to that issue from its placement.

Severin and Tankard (1997) as cited in Asemah and Yaroson (2008: 95) said, "newspaper has a great part in determining what most people will be talking about, what most people will think the facts are and what people will regard as the way problems are to be dealt with. "The media provided great coverage of the 2015 Nigerian presidential elections, but the frames used focused more on the candidates than on issues or policies. The frames revolve around the

presidential candidates, their abilities, achievements and idiosyncrasies without any clear insight into their policies.

The agenda setting role of the media has been exemplified by the data presented and discussed so far in this chapter. The media projected the likely winner to the disadvantage of the other party's candidate, and it appears that the media's projection contributed to the results of the elections. All these attest to the crucial role and influence of the media in moulding and shaping the direction of public discussions as well as influencing voting during elections. The factors that resulted in the poor performance of Goodluck Jonathan and the PDP during the 2015 elections served as a leverage for Muhammadu Buhari and the APC. Buhari's campaign team focused on major issues that the masses complained about during Jonathan's administration. The campaign team and the APC made promises to deal with and resolve issues such as corruption, infrastructural development, terrorism, and unemployment.

The media seemed to have done a great in providing daily reports about the activities of both the PDP and APC before and during the elections. With the aid of the media, Nigerians could stay abreast on what was happening during the 2015 elections. All efforts by the then incumbent government to amend the negative perceptions towards Goodluck Jonathan and the PDP proved futile, despite the postponement of the elections from February 14 to March 28. In the end, APC's Muhammadu Buhari was declared the winner of the presidential elections with 15,424,921 votes as against PDP's Goodluck Jonathan with 12,853,162 votes.

Chapter Five

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Summary

This study investigates the frames used in the coverage of Goodluck Jonathan and Muhammadu Buhari by three Nigerian newspapers: *Punch*, *The Nation* and *Premium Times*. It specifically identifies the frames, especially the preponderant ones that formed the basis for discussion in the build-up to the election. In this chapter, the researcher presents a summary of the entire study from chapter one to chapter five with a view to understanding its rationality and reliability.

Chapter One gives an overall background to the study beginning with the definition of media and election, then situating these concepts within the 2015 Nigerian presidential elections. It goes further to affirm the media as an institution that plays a pivotal role in creating awareness and shaping attitudes in societies including Nigeria. The awareness created by the media include political education, political parties and their activities, their candidates, campaigns, election which include presidential elections. It ends with a statement of problems, objectives of the study, research questions and significance of the study among others.

Chapter Two investigated the literature by diverse scholars that were considered suitable, pertinent and relevant to the study. Scholars view were reviewed on issues such as the political system of Nigeria, media and election, political advertising in the media, media coverage of elections in Nigeria. It also examined empirical studies carried out by scholars and researchers in this line.

Chapter Three presented the methodology adopted for the study, Research Design, Methods of data Collection, Sources of data, Method of Analysis. The study adopted the Agenda setting and Framing theory to prove that the media reported using slants or frames, which favour a candidate over the other.

Chapter Four presented content analysis that was used for this study and confined itself to the 2015 presidential elections. The sampling frame was restricted to the three months before the election was conducted. The study focused on three (3) Nigerian newspapers: Punch, The nation, and Premium Times. The researcher did a detailed analysis and interpretation of data as set out in Chapter Three.

Summarily, the research also affirms that media reporting has moderate influence too on leadership ascendancy. The manner, trend and language of the frequency of newspaper reporting of presidential elections of the period under study was more of hate speeches and insults, promises, threats, campaigns, APC and PDP reporting's of Buhari and Jonathans prominence. Finally, emphasis was laid on religious and ethnic interest, revealing places and people with problems in fighting and war of words. The role of ownership when it comes to factors influencing media framing was discussed, especially in relation to *The Nation*.

Chapter Five, which is this current chapter, provides an overall conclusion to this study. It also re-affirms the significance of the study, and provides recommendations for further studies.

5.2 Conclusion

The mass media played a significant role in creating political awareness before and during the 2015 presidential elections. According to Salman (2016), "In Nigeria, political advertorials

especially those place in the print media still remain very important for candidates and political parties to promote themselves to the electorate as well as countering any disparaging materials by their opponents in the press. The relative importance of print media as an appropriate medium of disseminating political messages is not necessarily based on media penetration or circulation but the strategic role of the press” (p.3). This study affirms the strong link between mass communication and politics, agreeing with McQuail (2005), who asserts that:

There has always been an intimate connection between mass communication and the conducts of politics, in whatever kind of regime. In totalitarian or authoritarian societies, ruling elites use their control of the media to ensure conformity and compliance and stifle dissent by one means or another. In democracies, the media have a complex relationship with sources of power and political system. On the other hand, they usually find their *raison d'etre* in their services to the audiences, to whom they provide information and views according to judgments of interest and need. In order to perform this service, they need to be independent of the state and powerful interest. On the other hand, they also provide channels by which the state and powerful interests address the people, as well as platforms for the views of political parties and other interest's groups. They also promote the circulation of news and opinion within politically interest groups. (p.523-4).

Based on this study, the media portrayed a specific presidential candidate as their preferred option ahead of the elections. The results of the 2015 presidential election indicated the influence of media agenda setting and consequently its effect on leadership position, as the emergence of leadership at the presidential level in Nigeria in 2015 was influenced by media reporting.

The study has brought to the fore the fact that media ownership influenced reporting of particular news items and campaigns in the 2015 presidential elections. The data from this study revealed conclusively that in the coverage of issues, specifically 2015 elections, the newspapers owned by politicians reflected the dominant interests and views of their financiers in their political reports. This caused biased and most of the times misleading of the voters to accept information that are not true and reliable which amounted to voting candidates that might have not been the sincere choice of the voters.

5.3 Recommendations

The National Broadcasting Commission should strictly implement the Electoral Act 2010 No. 6 Section 99-102; on media houses both private and public owned that engage in reporting hate speeches and propaganda.

Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and National Orientation Agency (NOA) should carry out huge improved political education programme to educate the masses on how to identify true facts spread by the media by critically analysing the reports by media organizations.

National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and the Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON) should work together to make sure that presidential debates are done ahead of the elections to enable the public to evaluate each candidate and determine who is more competent to lead. This way the electorate would become more objective, and not rely totally on reports from the media.

The electorate themselves should learn to be objective and not just flow with the wind and caprices of whatever individuals or the media gives out as information, but should critically analyse, make inquiries, before voting in a candidate that will not bring about growth and development in the country.

The Nigerian Press Council, and Broadcasting Organization of Nigeria (BON) should monitor hate speeches and attack on personalities that could lead to violence, and sanction media houses who go against the regulations and code of conduct of the Broadcasting and press institution.

Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the Department of State Security should work hand in hand to monitor the electioneering campaigns of each candidate of all political parties in order to ensure that they do not engage in any form of hate speeches or unnecessary reputational damage. Offenders should be made to face stiff sanctions up to disqualification from contesting elections in the case of repeated abuse.

5.4 Contribution to Knowledge

The study has empirically added to the body of literature and library as a reference point on the role of media in politics, especially during elections with specific reference to the 2015 presidential elections in Nigeria. Media reporting influences leadership ascendancy in Nigeria

during the 2015 presidential elections in that they set the agenda for political discussions and by projecting a particular candidate in their campaigns as being influenced by ownership of the media.

The study has contributed in composite effect of media reporting to voting behaviour on leadership ascendancy 2015 presidential election in that it has both negative and positive influence on leadership ascendancy. It projected a particular candidate as a better candidate than the other, instigating citizens to a particular candidate in favour of the winner.

The study has empirically shown the relationship between media ownership and media reporting in Nigeria, and highlighted the effects of biased reporting influenced by media ownership. In doing this, the study has brought to the fore the fact that media ownership influenced reporting of particular news items and campaigns in the 2015 presidential elections.

5.5 Suggestion for Further Studies

Beyond a study of print media, precisely newspapers as done in this study, further studies can be done using broadcast media like television adverts as data for analysis. Also, other researchers could conduct research on the relationship between the influence of the other factors such as opinion and community leaders and selfish interests, and how such factors contribute to leadership ascendancy in Nigeria. In addition, there can be research on other candidates aside from the two major candidates, which have been analysed in this study.

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