Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies (SGOJAHDS), Vol.4 No.2 June, 2021; p.g. 307 – 321; ISSN: 2695-2319 (Print); ISSN: 2695-2327 (Online)

MEDIA FRAMING AND ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA FOURTH REPUBLIC

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Abstract

Elections serve as a legitimate means to usher in a new government or in some instances, signifying the continuation of a regime. However, in Sub-Saharan Africa, elections are usually marred by spates of violence. Media framing theory was used to underpin this study. The media framing theory depicts the agenda setting role of the media in shaping the perception of the electorates based on the news disseminated. The Methodology used in this study is qualitative. The content of three Newspapers namely The Punch, This Day and The Guardian were analysed. Findings revealed that there is a direct link between media framing and election violence in Nigeria. Although, media framing is a relatively new phenomenon, electoral violence is not new to the Nigerian context. Furthermore, it was discovered that through the use of several metaphoric expressions, the media is able to convey certain expressions made by political actors. This expression are interpreted differently by the electorates and in interpretation, violence ensues every election year. Therefore, this study recommended that there is a lot of work to be done by the election regulatory bodies and the justice system. The study also recommended that legal actions should be taken against perpetrators of electoral violence and that there should be sanctions put in place against media houses who promote electoral violence through the way they frame the news.

Keywords: Elections, Media, Violence, Media Framing, Electoral Violence.

Introduction

Elections is one of the fundamental features of democracy in both developed and developing countries and is the legitimate means to usher in a new regime periodically (Pomper, 1967) hence the electoral process is expected to contribute towards democratic consolidation in any given society but insecurities, violence and killings in relation to elections have seen a rise in death tolls amongst many African nations (Goldsmith, 2014).

A host of bodies including the media play very vital roles in the electoral process. In most climes, elections end up in violence (Osah and Ibrahim, 2016) and this often breeds misdemeanor and mishaps. Thus, may become the focal point of tensions and bear the risk of violence. Infunctional democracies, the media stays sacrosanct as a go-between the people and those holding power for their sake. During the time of democratic transitions most

citizens are informed about political issues through the media and people form impressions and assessment of political actors and events through the information made available by intermediaries, such as the media, political parties and people with whom they analyze politics. This makes many in the society to assume that the media has an effect on voters' impression of political parties and their candidates, thus, can make them vote in favor of one candidate over another. The way that the media galvanizes and focuses on societal problems, cultural issues and provide insights about candidates vying public offices bring into fore the motivation to assess media works and the effects of agenda-setting, framing, and priming effects of issues in the news (Nwofe, 2016). More so, the way the media presents, analyses and report electoral activities and speeches of politicians and their associates greatly affects outcomes of peace or conflict before, during and after elections (Tella, 2019).

Within the African context, scholars like Demarest and Langer (2019) have discussed extensively the link between media framing of languages of politicians and electoral violence. These studies on electoral violence in Africa have focused on the way the media reports inflammatory languages to instigate violence before, during and after elections. Umechukwu (2001) observed that the growth of Nigerian politics is entwined and has a strong correlation with that of the media. Unfortunately, in many African countries elections are the battleground for resource control, which raises the stakes and likelihood (Institute for Security Studies, 2019). Thus the States have the likelihood for clashes as a result during election periods. In Nigeria, the electoral processes bring about unwarranted political instability all across the 36 states in the federation. In the process of electioneering activities, inflammatory political rhetoric, opposition parties' allegations of intimidation and partisanship by security forces, particularly of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and planned illegal voting and results rigging raises the potential for violence (Kwarkye, 2019). Isola (2018) noted that while hate speech manifests itself regularly, it crystallizes during election periods when the struggle for votes and political power provides conducive environment for hate speech and elections-related violence. Some politicians, public officers, religious figures, and ethnic jingoists spread hate messages during and after elections in both traditional and social media in the form of campaign advertisements, slogans, and verbal expressions. These expressions sometimes translate into physical exchanges and violence in public spaces.

The theory adopted in this paper is the Framing theory. The main idea behind the framing theory is that the way information is presented to an audience has an influence on the choices people make about how to process such information. Frames usually work together in abstract forms to give meaning to a particular structure or message. Frames have become increasingly linked with news and the mode in which the media place emphasis on the information they convey. The frames used by the media are seen to influence the perception of information by the audience and as such tells the audience indirectly how to think about the issue.

The theory was first used by Erving Goffman in his book Frame Analysis (1974). Goffman attested that audiences interpret situations around them through their primary framework. Similarly, framing occurs in the form of constructing social realities. The media frames information in ways that enables the audience interprets and discuss public events. Consequently, Kosicki and McLeod (1990) identified three dimensions to framing of the news. The dimensions include active processing, reflective interrogation and selective scanning. While active processing refers to seeking of information based on the incompleteness of

information released by the media, reflective interrogation refers to thoughts on information gathered from the media while selective scanning refers to the use of media to get specific information only relevant to the audience. This uses framing to understand how the media influences the opinion of their audience by emphasizing on salience of the issue rather than setting the agenda for how the audience thinks. The emphasis on the issue will unconsciously influence the way the audience think thereby shaping their opinion through a structure.

In understanding framing of electoral violence, there are two unique frames used by the media: the conflict frame and the game frame. The conflict frame is based on the media's use of metaphorical expressions to depict electoral violence (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997) while the game frame is based on the media's use of metaphors in describing elections as a contest or tussle for power (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997; De Vreese, 2012; Vladisavljevic, 2015; Brugman et al, 2019). These specifications of electoral violence framing are in line with the generic news frames. The game frame focuses on the media framing of election as a sports contest with elections having high value. Furthermore, the game frame emphasizes the winner versus loser syndrome (De Vreese, 2012). Through focusing on political candidates' position on the polls, the game frame portrays metaphorically portrays election as a race (Vladisavljevic, 2015). Another frame that is closely related to the game frame and has garnered much coverage through the media is the strategy frame. The strategy frame focuses on comparing elections to military tactics by highlighting politicians' strategies to win elections particularly through political intimidation and rioting (Kumah-Abiwu, 2017).

Conceptual discourse

The Media

The media are the means through which information is disseminated from one point to another (Dwivedi et al, 2018). O'Sullivan et al (1998) simply state that media are channels of communication. McCombs and Shaw (1972) noted that media are the means of communication through which many people are reached. The media also refers to traditional communication systems used for generation of content through technology for mediated human speech (Bastiansen, 2008).Asemah (2011) describes traditional media as communication channels through which information is spread to an audience. Traditional media has a wide range of functions and some of them include surveillance, entertainment, adverts and agenda setting.

One powerful weapon of the media for the accomplishment of notable task is the setting agenda. With the power of setting agenda they easily mobilize people. The media can also be used in the reserves, by setting diabolic agenda which can destroy the peace and tranquility of the nation (Awofadeju, Adeymo, Kwembili&Adesaanya, 2015) as they are gate keeper by allowing what gets through the media gate and sieving out others that are rejected. By this gate-keeping process, the media have an enormous power in steering the direction of reports on electoral violence.

Elections

Elections serve as critical part of a democratic government that emphasizes the content of public decisions (Pomper, 1967; Oni, 2020); legitimize the process of selection of leaders and shows the government is accepted by the masses (Rapoportand Weinberg, 2000). Obakhedo (2011) notes that election is a legal instrument for maintaining social order as well as a tool to

hold public office holders accountable; a way for the majority to support government in power or to replace the government by voting.

Elections serve as the instrument that enables public opinion to be channeled by political parties into decisions ascertaining who will make up the government (Fisher et al, 2018). One key essence of election is that it forms the bedrock of a genuine democratic system and through which the electorates are provided with the ample opportunity to vote for their preferred candidates, who will push their demands to the highest level of policy making (Olowojolu, Rasak& Ake, Ogundele&Afolayan, 2019).

Elections energize democratic governance in many fundamental ways, including enabling the voters to select their leaders, facilitating access to public sphere for the purpose of airing their governance ideas (Tella, 2019) and is done periodically in democratic regimes by conducting free and fair elections, and the electorates are allowed to exercise their franchise by voting a candidate or a party whom the electorate see to be the best choice among other options (Laden-Baki, 2008).

Electoral Violence

Electoral violence involves all forms of organized acts of threats aimed at intimating, harming, blackmailing of a political stakeholder or opponent before, during and after an election with the intension to determine, delay or influence a political process. In the same view, Ogundiya& Baba (2005) aver that electoral violence include all sorts of riots, demonstrations, party clashes, political assassinations, looting, arson, thuggery, kidnapping spontaneous or not, which occur before, during and after elections. In this view, Fisher (2002) assert that electoral violence comprises any random or organized act that seeks to determine, delay, or otherwise influence an electoral process through threat, verbal intimidation, hate speech, disinformation, physical assault, forced "protection", blackmail, destruction of property or assassination. And Taylor and Taylor(2018) noted that electoral violence involves the use of arms and ammunition, inflammatory languages and means of political intimidation to influence the outcome of elections. Schedler (2002) therefore view electoral violence as a type of election wrongdoing that draws similarities with diverse forms of electoral fraud.

Electoral violence according to Hoglund (2009) has four major points which are: the motive, the timing, the actors, and the targets of the violence. Inadvertently, the main motivation behind electoral violence is to have a domineering influence on the election. However, Taylor and Taylor (2018) are of the opinion that electoral violence usually has a vested interest in the outcome of the specific election. They added that electoral violence, therefore, is coercive force which is directed to political actors in the context of electoral competition.

News Framing

Framing according to Davie (2014) bears similarity to the agenda setting theory of media but what separates both is that faming focuses more on the essence of an issue rather than on a topic. With framing, the media pays more attention on specific events and situates them within a given context. A typical example is the framing of the issue of electoral violence. Framing ensures that the focus remains on issues of electoral violence and not the broad topic of electoral malpractices.

According to Matthes (2009), framing uses different tools such as metaphors, messages and images to examine the salience of specific issues and events. This definition given by Matthes (2009) explores the context in which framing is effective and further observes that there are certain tools or languages that the media use to influence the opinion of their audience. Iyengar (2019) supports this definition by stating that framing occurs when opinions on an issue is altered by placing emphasis on parts of the issue. Gitlin (2007) highlights that framing is based on principles and these principles revolve around the choosing of implicit theories of "what exists, what matters and what happens" (Matthes 2009:350).

Entman (1993) asserts that frames have functions they perform generally such as problem definition, making moral judgements and providing support for remedies. The statement is rightly proven by De Vreese (2005) who believes that framing is an "integrated process model that includes the production, content and media perspectives" (2005:51). Nwofe (2016) noted that much of the power of framing comes from its ability to define problems – articulating cost and benefits - specifying causes, make moral assessments, and recommend solutions.

Media framing of electoral violence

There are unique frames adopted by the media to structure information set out and these frames shape the way the public think about these issues. The media frames electoral violence either in terms of general events or violent events. The framing of electoral violence in terms of general events include: Protests (demonstations and sit-ins), riots (violent protests and mob-justice), Kidnapping (for non-criminal purposes), armed attacks (assassination attempts, violence against civilian population) and terrorists attacks (suicide bombers and car bombings) (Demarest and Langer, 2019).

Iyengar (2019) and Druckman (2001) have been able to identify two key effects of media framing and these framing effects would be used to understand how framing of electoral violence works in the political landscape of Nigeria. The two framing effects identified are equivalency framing effect and emphasis framing effect. The equivalency framing centers on the use of logical words or phrases while the emphasis framing is based on putting relevance on a segment of an issue to increase the salience

Electoral Violence in 2015 and 2019 General Elections

Historically, Nigeria has had thirteen General Elections and numerous regional/state/local elections between 1954 and 2019. Most of these have been fraught with both pre and post-election violence. Nwolise (2007), Campbell (2010)traced electoral violence in Nigeria to animosity, religious diversity, pervasive poverty and weak institutionalization of the structures of democracy such as political parties, election management bodies, law enforcement agencies and the judiciary.

Although some election observers noted that the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria were free and fair, uncontrolled hate speech during the elections resulted in divisiveness of the country in this line, The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) reported riots and violent incidents in at least 22 of Nigeria's 36 states during the 2015 electoral campaigns and throughout the election process, which left at least 58 people dead and thousands injured. The NHRC traced many of these incidents to incitement and hateful communication deployed during the campaigns and reported by the media (National Human Rights Commission,

2015). For example, Isola (2018) observed that some actors use derogatory terms in local languages—such as pigs (elede), cow (malu), goats (akuya), cockroaches (aayan)- to label the opposition. Some of these incendiary terms directed insults to specific local groups which other groups perceived as impeding them from access to power and were suggestive of incitement to violence against them.

The 2015 and 2019 General Elections witnessed the highest levels of violence within the history of the country, as over seventy persons lost the lives throughout the exercise (Onimisi, 2019). Beside the loss of lives recorded throughout the General Election, ballot box snatching, burning of election materials, kidnapping of candidates and their family members and burning of homes of high political aspirants were consistent features of the 2015 and 2019 General Elections (Verjee, Kwaja and Onubogu, 2018). Also, post-electoral violence has become a norm in the Nigeria and as such has created close connection with socio-economic inequalities; heighten spiritual and ethnic divisions, increasing cases of corruption, weak state establishments, structural weaknesses, abuse and use of power of the state to favour incumbents (Onimisi, 2015). Furthermore, Election day February 23, 2019 in the South-South geo-political zone of Federal Republic of Nigeria saw electoral violence claim the life of associate ad-hoc workers in Rivers state by political thugs while several electoral workers sustained a different levels of injuries (Ajayi, 2019). In Delta state, 5 persons were confirmed killed 5 days to the presidential elections during a clash amongst the supporters the All Progressives Congress and the People's Democratic Party. Also, in Ughelli South Local Government Area, political thugs engaged in sporicidal shooting on voters, killing at least one person and juried many individuals throughout Gubernatorial and House of Assembly elections (Oladele, et al 2019). Similarly, in Rivers State at the 2015 General Elections, six persons were confirmed killed by political thugs while one suspected box snatcher was shot dead at a polling unit in Ikot Udo Ossiom village, Ukanafun council of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria (Oladele, et al 2019).

Nigeria's 2019 presidential election witnessed significant inciting campaigns across political climes and among political elites, prime political appointees, political thugs, and political loyalties. The extent of the inciting campaign carried before the final election gave way to the high level of violence in some sections of the country. The political loyalists acted on some inciting statements of their 'political godfather' invariably resulted in electoral violence witnessed throughout the 2015 and 2019 general elections. According to Ehinmore and Ehiabhi (2013) election campaigns in Nigeria are usually characterised by show of lawlessness, political intimidation, insults of political opponents, confrontations of every kind and intimidation of perceived enemy which regularly run to violence throughout and when the election (Angerbrandt, 2018).

Conflict Framing of Electoral Violence in Nigeria

The reporting of conflict in Nigerian elections usually takes diverse dimensions (Demarest and Langer, 2019). There is usually a substantial difference between how newspapers report conflict issues during election period and outside the election period (Earl et al, 2004). Thus, even when the media is supposed to be objective and operate without bias, diverse perspectives are presented when it comes to conflict. The resultant effect of the media's reporting of conflict during elections is that divisions could occur amongst the electorates

which in turn could lead to taking up arms and ammunitions in support of one preferred candidate or the other.

Muo (2018) in his report on election violence in Nigeria stated that violent conflict has been a key feature of elections in Nigeria since independence. Furthermore, the reason for the violent conflicts during elections is because of the zeal of political actors to exploit ethno-religious conflicts for political advantage. In the 2015 and 2019 General Elections, the two major parties were the All Progressives Congress and the People's Democratic Party. According to the statistics presented by Sule (2019), compared to 2015 which had voter's turnout of 46.8%, due to the fear of violence in the 2019 elections, the 2019 General Elections recorded only 39.09% voter's turnout.

The patterns of violent conflicts during the 2015 and 2019 General Elections in *The Punch, Guardian* and *This Day* newspapers were cross-referenced to ascertain the level of violence that were propelled by inciting statements. The cross-reference showed that majority of the reports by the three newspapers were as a result of supporters clash, campaign events incidents, political intimidation and attacks on the personality of political candidates and actors alike. Reports from *The Punch, This Day* and *The Guardian* were reviewed from September 2014 to March 2015 and from September 2018 to February 2019 as this represents the entire election period in Nigeria. *The Punch, The Guardian and This Day* newspapers had reports in relation to violent conflict. However, while *The Guardian* reports more on general violent conflict issues, *This Day* newspaper relies more on reports relating to Boko Haram during election period which were politically motivated. Similarly, *The Punch* newspaper reported on violent conflicts and politically motivated conflicts.

The media also reported incidents of armed assaults during the election period by *The Punch, The Guardian* and *This Day* newspapers. Furthermore, *The Punch, The Guardian and This Day* newspapers also reports incidences where the political parties are the victims of violent conflicts rather than as perpetrators of the violent conflicts. A typical example of this is seen in the reports rendered by Adeyemi et al (2019) on 'election deaths'. In this report, Adeyemi et al (2019) asserts that most of the wards attacked had more APC members than PDP members and the conflict between both parties ensued because of a heated argument between the supporters of both parties in states where the opposition had more supporters (The Punch, March 10, 2019).

Besides, reports from *This Day* newspaper states that in the build up to the 2019 elections, over thirteen deaths were recorded nationally with over half of these deaths occurring within proximity of the election period. These numbers are considerably very low in relation to the high numbers of election related violent conflicts reported between 2003 and 2015 (Campbell, 2019). Furthermore, death reports from the newspapers were very high during the election period and after the election period. This is because political actors are more conscious of their actions during the elections and after the election. The actions during the election period and after the election period often attract the attention of the media as they search for information to feed the electorate. Furthermore, both newspapers report an increase in death toll in the two months leading to the main election.

Similarly, a report was published by Azuka Onwuka, a correspondent of The Punch Newspaper, the 2019 General Elections was "watered by the blood of Nigerians". Onwuka noted in his report that the deaths and violence in the 2019 General Elections, left a sour taste in the mouth as it turned out to be both demoralising and embarrassing. He further noted in his report that the violence that ensued after the 2019 General Elections resulted in the death of over 40 people nationwide. In Rivers State alone, 30 people were reported dead, 3 in Kogi State, 2 in Bayelsa, 2 in Delta and 1 in Oyo state (The Punch, February 26, 2019).

The quality of the electoral method whether politicians settle for the result, and the messages they send their supporters will have a large impact on post-election violence. *This Day, The Punch* and *Guardian* newspapers report that Muslim rioters targeted and killed Christians and citizens of other tribes from southern Nigeria, who were believed to be in support of the ruling party, burning their churches, shops, and homes. The rioters collectively attacked police stations and ruling party and electoral commission offices. In largely Christian communities in Northern states, crowds of Christians retaliated by killing Muslims and causing severe damages to their mosques and properties (Igho, 2019). Pre-election violence tends to be taken from a local context because it involves conflict between local politicians, disruptions at campaign rallies, isolated clashes between supporters of political actors. If, however, an oversized proportion of individuals plan to reject the results of this election the probability of widespread pre-election violence will increase. This was seen after the announcement of Muhammad Buhari as President in 2019. The Challenger in person of Alhaji Atiku Abubakar rejected the results and this led to the high death toll post-election as reported by *The Guardian* newspaper.

The period of election in Nigeria witnessed persistent attacks by sections of the Boko Haram group within the northeast; inflated communal violence between herdsmen and farmers spreading southward from north-central states; and an intense increase in crime, kidnapping, and killings within the north-western states. Furthermore, *This Day* newspaper framed violence related conflicts to attacks and threats on the lives of election officials and voters. *This Day, The Punch* and *The Guardian* reported incidents of hijacking of voting materials and disrupted voting. In the three newspapers, conflict was framed in form of "assault and intimidation" by political thugs. According to reports in *This Day* newspaper, the military who were supposed to protect the lives of citizens, were on high alert shooting anyone seen around polling units. Furthermore, *This Day* also reported that the election was "marred by violence, security lapses and instances of overreach. Other challenges include compromised INEC officials as well as partisan security operatives" (Ezigbo et al, 2019).

Furthermore, *The Punch* made reference to a statement made by the Katsina State governor, Ibrahim Shema urging his supporters to kill any opposition member. Shema believed that the opposition were cockroaches and as a result there was a need to crush them. The news headline as reported by Mohammed Lere (2014) read "Katsina Governor, Shema, caught on video urging supporters to "crush", "kill" political opponents.

The Governor who spoke in Hausa, likened the opposition to "cockroaches" before asking the crowd what to do if they found such insects in their houses. The crowd chorused "Kill them" In response and agreement with the crowd, Shema shouted "Crush them". This response by

the then Governor of Katsina State, was a call to the people to kill anyone that tried to stop their party from emerging victorious at the election polls.

The Game Frame in the 2019 General Elections

The Guardian newspaper reported in October 2018 that the nomination of Alhaji Atiku Abubakar as the preferred candidate of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), put all doubts to bed and concluded that the Nigerian presidential election of 2019 would be a 'two horse race'. The horse in this context used to represent both Muhammad Buhari and Abubakar Atiku. While there is an agreement in reports from *This Day* and *The Guardian* of the election been a two horse-race, there were reports of a slight underdog in female presidential candidate Oby Ezekwesili. However, the decision of Oby Ezekwesili to drop out of the presidential race, left no one to challenge the Buhari and Atiku who were symbolised by the media as horses.

Elections have also been described by both This Day and The Guardian newspapers in 2015 as a tussle for power between the two political parties in Nigeria as other parties were not considered strong contenders in the election. However, Muhammad Buhari in an APC rally stated that the 2019 elections were not a do or die affair. This statement made by Buhari countered the statement of former president of Nigeria Olusegun Obasanjo who claimed that for the PDP, winning the election was a do or die affair. This strife and struggle for power was relatively evident all through the political campaign as political actors took the mantle to win at all cost on their shoulders.

In the bid to win the election at all cost, political actors result in the use of manipulative tools to intimidate and threaten the supporters of the opposition party. The use of political intimidation and threats were to further strengthen the position of each political actor. As *The Guardian* newspaper reported, Buhari stated in clear terms that if there was rigging in the 2015 elections, the dogs and the baboons will be soaked in blood. The dogs and baboons in this instance represent perpetrators of the rigging and any other citizen caught in the line of fire. Also, the First lady Aisha Buhari in condemning certain individuals who were trying to wrestle power from her husband said "the hyenas and jackals in her husband's kingdom will soon be sent packing" (This Day, July 11, 2017).

The reason for the use of inflammatory languages like this is to serve as a deterrent to individuals who feel violence is the way. However, this has not been the case as supporters of Buhari took to the streets to ensure that nothing stopped their party from winning the election (The Punch, January 12, 2019). However, Buhari reiterated that the elections were not a do or die affair trying to create a level of calm in the storm.

Some political actors make provocative statements that can tear the country apart in the name of campaign, while there are political actors who have resulted to exchange of punches all in the bid to win the elections at all cost. Furthermore, the saying that 'when two elephant fight, it is the grass that suffers' best describes the situation of the game frame as reported by the *Punch* newspaper. Sadly, the masses are always at the receiving end, as the ruling party and opposition party meet on the election field. Party members are constantly at war with each other.

Furthermore, electoral competitiveness has been a key feature in elections in Nigeria with on political party wanting to outshine the other political party. In the bid to do this, each political party puts their best foot forward. The game frame becomes very relevant here because of the competitiveness and the power struggle. As earlier stated, political actors in Nigeria see elections as a do or die affair and are willing to go to any extent to win the election. Also, in some states in Nigeria, the media reported high level of competition between the two key political parties. *The Guardian* and *The Punch* reported significant level of competition in states like Rivers (30%), Ekiti (18%), Lagos (18%), Osun (13%), Edo (12%) and Benue (9%) while *This Day* reported high level of competition in states like Rivers (28%), Ekiti (14%), Abuja (14%), Edo (10%), Akwa Ibom (9%), Kwara (9%), Lagos (9%) and Cross Rivers (7%). The reports by *Guardian* in the states were tagged with words like power tussle and struggle for dominance while the reports in *This Day* were framed as horse race and winner vs loser.

Therefore, from the evidences, it can be seen that the game frame was used in reporting election as a competition between who wins and who loses. For example, based on reports from *The Guardian,* the National Publicity Secretary of the People's Democratic Party, Mr Kola Ologbondiyan claimed that Benue state was a stronghold for the party and the state will not be relinquished under any circumstance. In his words,

In Benue, the people have rejected the APC, as clearly demonstrated even in the presidential election. Benue State has always been home to the PDP. It is incontestable that our party has the largest genuine followership in all the units, wards and local government areas of the state and as such does not need any underhand measure to secure victory in any election in the state (Akregha et al., 2019).

Based on this statement, it is clear that election is a game that the political party is not ready to lose and as such, the party is willing to do everything necessary to secure victory. Also, in *This Day* newspaper, in most of the conflict prone states, the portrayal of election as a game was very evident. According to Okoye and Obosi (2019) reporting for *This Day,*
President Buhari would kiss the dust regarding the 2019 Presidential election.

Based on this statement, it is glaring that there were predictions from all angles by diverse political analysts that President Muhammed Buhari would lose the election to his opponent. The way the media referred to the loss was by saying Buhari would kiss the dust. The term kissing the dust is one usually used in athletics or wrestling (Olukotun, 2018). The term simply means that Buhari was going to lose the election with no hope of recovery. Furthermore, the game frame is evident in the portrayal of both presidential candidates as incumbent and challenger. In this sense incumbent means the current holder of the office while challenger signifies the opponent seeking to take over power from the current office holder.

Conclusion

The media landscape in Nigeria is one filled with vigour. However, due to pressure from political actors, the Nigerian media has been dubbed partly free. As earlier stated, the essence of this dissertation is to understand how the media framed electoral violence in Nigeria's 2015 and 2019 general elections. In the bid to understand how the media framed electoral violence in Nigeria, the framing theory was used, and two frames were picked to enhance understanding of methods employed by the media to frame violence related issues during the

2015 and 2019 general elections. A common practice amongst some media outlets in Nigeria is gaining political favours and they tend to favour one political candidate over the other. However, the extent to which these influences affect the quality of reporting remains insufficiently investigated. Three Nigerian newspapers with objective political views and non-party affiliation were used and analysis on electoral conflict pre- and post-2015 and 2019 elections. Electoral violence reporting is particularly sensitive to political biases in the news media. The analyses showed that Nigerian news media reported on electoral violence relatively independently from political pressures.

The selection of these papers was guided by two principles: firstly, newspapers were selected based on objectivity and non-partisanship to any political party contesting the election. The second criterion was that the papers had to be relatively national in scope and have a wide readership. Based on the above stated criteria, *The Guardian, The Punch* and *This Day* were selected due to their fairness in reporting election related conflict. Furthermore, conflict events analysed from the three newspapers covered from September 2014 to April 2015 and September 2018 to March 2019. The reason for choosing September was because some incidents were recorded in this month in relation to the election. Also recorded during the process of analysis were issues ranging from protests, riots, and political kidnappings. Lastly, the way the newspapers gave diverse and similar contexts of conflict events over the period covered by the election calendar was also looked at especially in relation to the two political parties involved in the horse race. By drawing inferences from the three newspapers, this dissertation was able to ascertain that the way the media frames electoral violence is dependent on neutrality and the media in the way they frame some of the languages used by the political actors can indirectly create an avenue for violence to occur either pre or post-election.

Recommendations

Legal efforts would do well to focus on the judiciary by strengthening and clarifying existing laws around hate speech. Meanwhile, the INEC can do more to collaborate with civil society and the media to educate the public about hate speech, as well as partner with law enforcement to bring prosecutions against offenders. International partners supporting electoral processes in Nigeria need to pay more attention to the influence of hate speech on African elections and support capacity-building to tackle hate speech by their in-country partners. They could also assist by sharing lessons learned in other countries on best practices in identifying and preventing hate speech from interfering with elections in Nigeria.

Furthermore, the media should try to report any news received objectively and without bias as that can help put voters on the right track when choosing candidates to vote for. Also, the media should be used as a tool to enlighten voters on the hazards of electoral violence. The media should also be used as a sensitization tool to canvas against some of the comments made by political actors in the bid to win elections.

There should be laws put in place to prevent the media from reporting news that could elicit electoral violence as these laws would allow the media to be very objective and have little or no bias towards any political party.

Legal actions should be taken against perpetrators of electoral violence and that there should be sanctions put in place against media houses who promote electoral violence through the way they frame the news.

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