

Political Violence and Media Coverage in Nigeria: An Analysis of Nigerian Tribune and Punch Newspapers of 2011 General Elections in Osun State

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ABSTRACT

The study aims at determining the coverage of the violence by two newspapers (Nigerian Tribune and Punch) in the 2011 Osun State General Election by adopting content analysis as its research design. Theories adopted in carrying out this study are agenda setting, two step flow and multi-step flow. This study reveals that the newspapers in this study were not very effective in publishing the news concerning this brutal electoral violence within the period of four weeks under review. It also reveals that the Nigerian Tribune newspaper covered more stories on electoral violence than Punch newspaper and that the coverage of the two newspapers focused more on violence reportage than the effects of violence on the electorates. The coverage of the two newspapers on the major actors in the news also shows that 'Politicians' and Political parties' played greater role in the news than others. The coverage of the two newspapers on victims of the violence shows that 'Electorates' and 'Press' were most affected victims than others. It therefore concludes that the two newspapers content analyzed were not proactive enough in their responsibility of providing timely information to the general public regarding the electoral violence, thereby leaving people in the dark.

Keywords: *Mass Media, Violence, Politics, Electorate.*

INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the cold war, high premium has been globally placed on democratic governance attained through successfully conducted elections that meet international standards and acceptability. This is based on the notion that a government that emerged through a transparently conducted election is likely to have an agenda for sustainable development, which contributes to peace and security. As a matter of fact, scholars are of the opinion that peacefully conducted elections that are free and fair are also critical to the maintenance of both national as well as global peace and security. Across the globe, elections are generally seen as platforms on which people freely choose their leaders and make significant contributions to how their destiny and livelihood are shaped. This is why democracy is seen as the fulcrum in which a society can lay a strong foundation for its socio-economic and political stability. But when viewed against the backdrop of free and

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fair elections, the political events in Nigeria have been markedly different. From time immemorial, violence has been constant characteristics of human societies all over the world, and in particular, today's world is awash with violence (Ayeni, 2008). Electoral violence which is the focus of this study is a variant of political violence that connotes the subversion of the electoral process through brute force, intimidation and attack or other violent means. Historically, violence is a major feature of political life, and in particular, political violence is a central part of political competition across the three levels of government in Nigeria. Unfortunately, Nigeria falls within the category of nation States where election periods are usually associated with all forms of violence, and all manner of fissiparous tendencies. Suffice it to say that the search for an increased understanding of electoral violence in Nigeria has led to a torrent of studies devoted to this phenomenon with part of the studies comprehensively addressing its forms and dimensions (Okanya, 2001).

However, prevalent forms of political violence in Nigeria exude in political assassinations, arsons, violence-prone campaigns, thuggery, election-related ethno-religious crisis, snatching of ballot boxes and other vices. Analysts agree that this has been possible because election in Nigeria is seen as a "do or die affair". This violence is most often carried out by gangs whose members are openly recruited and paid by politicians and party leaders to attack their rivals, intimidate members of the public, rig elections, and protect their patrons from similar attacks. It is intriguing to note that members of the political class responsible for instigating this plethora of violence as well as their foot-soldiers who undermine the electoral process by perpetrating these violent acts have never been brought to book. Political behaviouralists have argued that violent electoral behaviour which is either intended to hurt or kill political opponents or their supporters has a devastating human rights impact on ordinary Nigerians. In the same vein, they content that the scenario is prevalent because of the nature of the political system, the prevailing political culture and the level of political education and socialization.

In the Nigerian case, electoral violence is more entrenched because our political system is supportive of zero-sum game politics. This was why Otoghile (2009) describes electoral violence as the radioactive by-product of some structural and attitudinal dislocations in the society which affect the level of political participation of the citizenry. The run-up to Nigeria's April 2007 elections was violent, with campaigning in many area beset by political killings, bombings and armed clashes between supporters and rival political factions (Abutudu and Obakhedo, 2009). This violence forms part of a broader pattern of crises and abuse that is inherent in Nigeria's largely unaccountable political system. This same story cuts across the States of the federation. The alarming dimensions of the crisis and the fact that the perpetrators are never punished leading to a great distortion of democratic practice underscore the need to examine electoral violence in Nigeria's politics with specific examples. Thus, this study seeks to find out the dimension of Political Violence and Media Coverage in Nigeria, why media have not been able to cover and report violence, and the various pre, during and post electoral-violence that characterized the April 2007 elections in Nigeria. This study therefore examines some specific cases of electoral violence associated with the April 2011 general elections in Osun State.

The Role of Mass Media in Society

Mass media refers collectively to all media technologies that are intended to reach a large audience via mass communication. The term also refers to the organizations which control these technologies, such as television stations or publishing companies. Broadcast media (also known as electronic media) transmit their information electronically and comprise television, film and radio, movies, CDs, DVDs and some other devices like cameras and video consoles. Alternatively, print media use a physical object as a means of sending their information, such as newspapers, magazines, brochures, newsletters, books, leaflets and pamphlets. Internet media is able to achieve mass media status in its own right, due to the many mass media services it provides, such as e-mail, websites, blogging, social network and television. For this reason, many mass media outlets have a presence on the web, by such things as having TV ads which link to a website, or having games in their sites to entice gamers to visit their website. In this way, they can utilize the easy accessibility that the internet has, and the outreach that internet affords, as information can easily be broadcast to many different regions of the world simultaneously and cost-efficiently. Outdoor media is a form of mass media which comprises billboards, signs, placards placed inside and outside of commercial buildings and objects like shops and buses, flying billboards (signs in tow of airplanes), blimps, and skywriting. Public speaking and event organizing can also be considered as form of mass media.

The mass media perform their functions in every society. As they perform their functions in society, they do not work in isolation or in a vacuum, but in conjunction with other human and social institutions. According to Okunna (1999),

“Mass Media as a socializing agency works closely with other socializing agencies like the family, the school, the church, and the peer group. Through the process of socialization, the individual is made aware of and internalizes the values, norms and acceptable behaviour patterns of the society. The internalize means to learn something so well that it becomes a part of you. The mass media as a socializing agency provides a common knowledge, the internalization of which enables people to operate as effective members of their society”.

Wilbur (1991) uses the simple and common terms such as Watchers (Watchdogs), informer, teacher and entertainer. Lasswell (1993) identifies the some functions of mass media to include:

- (a) ***Surveillance of the environment:*** In every society, the mass media carefully watch what goes on and reports this in the news. In this way, the members of the society become aware of what is happening around them. This represents the way news stories or events about society are reported on the pages of the newspapers and magazines. Through exposure to the same information and the same interpretations of events, people learn to think along the same lines. They do not necessarily arrive at the same conclusion, although that may happen, yet they focus on the same elements of an issue. This is called the “Watchman” functions of communication.

- (b) ***Correlation of parts of the society in relation to their environment:*** This function amounts to a critical analysis of the events or news items and the preparation of the minds of the public for a possible reaction to such events going on around them. This is known as “Editorializing”. An editorial recommends a view points or proposes action on the part of the individual or government.
- (c) ***Transmission of culture from one generation to another:*** According to Lasswell (1993), this function is basically concerned with education and socialization. The society’s social heritage is passed from one generation to another. In primitive societies, one’s heritage and traditions were first passed along by word of mouth. Other functions of mass communication include entertainment, archieve, commerce, freedom of expression and self-actualization. The entertainment function involves provision of the messages to amuse the audience, help them to realize and ease their tension.

The Agenda Setting Theory

The theoretical framework for this work is agenda setting. This theory explains that the mass media, through the particular news stories and other kinds of information selected for publication as well as the prominence or emphasis ascribed to such stories and information, do pre-determine which public issues are important and which are less important in the society at any given time. The underlying assumption in this theory is that media agenda influence public agenda (that is to say, what issues people discuss at a given time), and public agenda, in turn, influence policy agenda, for instance, the policy priorities of government.

In any case, this powerful weapon in the hands of the media for the accomplishment of the noble task of setting agenda for the society, the media therefore, have the potential to set agenda for the society and mobilize them for the establishment of the polity. They can also be used in the reverse, setting diabolic agenda which can destroy the peace and tranquility of the nation. A lot more take place daily than what get reported. The communicators keep the gate, allowing what gets through the media gate and sieving out others that are rejected. So through this gate-keeping process, the media have an enormous power in steering the direction of reports on electoral violence in Nigeria. Electoral violence has been the bane of Nigeria’s democracy, there has been electoral violence all over the country, and this has been caused and heightened by the political system. The paramount role of the press is to inform, educate and entertain the public. Electoral violence attracts media attention both within and outside the country. However, some indigenous newspapers do not cover, or rather, fail to publish information on electoral violence in Nigeria media for either fear of attack by the perpetrators or have compromised their integrity for money thus their right and power to select what to and not to publish been influenced by the pay masters. However, the risks associated with the coverage of such violence is also a factor that hampers such reportage. The coverage of the electoral violence in the Nigerian Tribune and The Punch Newspapers includes the following subcategories.

1. **Nature:** This has to do with various types of story covered e.g. interview, cover story, news analysis, etc.

2. **Position of story:** The concern of this includes the various positions of the story on the electoral violence as covered by the newspapers, based on the page the story is placed.
3. **Month of coverage:** This category concerns the particular month of the coverage of the electoral violence by The Nigerian Tribune/Punch newspaper
4. **Subject matter:** This has to do with the subject matter of the story on the electoral violence viz: conflict, politics, religion and ethnicity
5. **Tone of story:** This includes the slant or tone of the story as covered by The Nigerian Tribune/Punch newspaper, neutral, favourable or unfavourable. This story can be neutral or favourable or unfavourable to the parties involved in the story
6. **Effect of the violence on the principal actors:** The concern of this includes how the violence affects political parties and the electorates
7. **The role of government in the violence:** This concerns activities of the government in curtailing the violence, which could be active, passive or in-between
8. **Actors in the News:** This has to do with the principal actors in the news during the period of the coverage of the violence.

Historical Perspective of Nigeria's Party Politics and Electoral Violence

There is no nation in the world today, which does not strive for the attainment of full democracy, the material and spiritual empowerment of her people. However, as striving differs in the conscious realization of these ideas, many nations are still caught in the tragic dance of hypocrisy and deceit. Such nations risk the danger of total violence and the pains of collective unrest. To many well-meaning observers and commentators, the democratization process in Nigeria has at best been haphazard and at worst non-existent. The contradictions of our colonial past and our inability to evolve a workable political system stem from the opportunism and lack of vision of most of the post-colonial elite. Okwudiba (1978) opines that ethnicity, more than any other factor is at the root cause of this. Politics, during the era of the nationalist struggle for independence from colonialism, was dominated by the conflict arising from the assertion of interests other than national interest (Okwudiba, 1978). In their inter-class struggles, the hegemonic regional factions of these privilege classes paid lip services to the desirability of national unity, and condemned ethnic particularism. For all intents and purposes, these declarations were not taken seriously and were never intended to be. The same people who inveighed against ethnicity and ethnic identity simultaneously institutionalized them by making them a basis for economic participation at both the regional and national level (Okwudiba, 1978).

The amalgamation of the Protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria in 1914 marked the beginning of a stupendous effort in socio-political engineering. That is, the creation of a modern State out of a collection of a number of independent nation States and nationalities. Add to that, the diversities in religion, culture and tradition, language, geography/climate among others when the Sir High Clifford Constitution of 1922 introduced the "Elective Principle" in governance, Herbert S. H. Macaulay followed up with the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) which contested and won all three seats

allocated to Lagos in the 1922 Legislative Council Elections, one would say that the experiment was off to a good and promising start. The Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) was a pan-Nigerian political organization and drew its membership across the country. However, the ethnicity question in the country eventually led to its break-up. The successor National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon later renamed National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) fared little better as the late Chief Obafemi Awolowo's Action Group Party took over and Northern People's Congress (NPC) transformed itself from an essentially cultural organization into a political party with the philosophy of "One North, One Destiny and One God". Although the NCNC hung on to its universalistic Pan-Nigeria vision and dreams, the carpet-crossing episode practically reduced it to a regional party with the return of Zik to the East to assume power through a crisis whose unwholesome effect on inter-ethnic relations in Eastern Nigeria remains till this day. The formation of other political parties and associations with clearly limited horizons e.g. United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC), Ibadan Parapo, Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) demonstrates conclusively that the NCNC was the odd man out in her visionary one Nigeria where ethnic and religious differences did not matter and should not count.

Since Nigeria became independent on October 1, 1960 with pomp and pageantry, the history of elections has been steeped in violence. This description is apt because it appeared that Nigerians seem to have acquired a culture of electoral violence as six of the seven general elections conducted since independence in 1960 have been violence-ridden 1964/1965, 1979, 1983, 1999, 2003 and 2007 (Malu, 2009). For example, at independence, the country adopted a parliamentary system of government akin to the British type. The first post-independence election organized by that government led by Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa/President Nnamdi Azikiwe in 1964 and 1965 were characterized by widespread complaints of fraud, violence and intimidation (Osaghae, 1998). Protest in the wake of the regional elections, which in some areas degenerated into a violent exercise in competitive rigging, led to widespread violence and inter-communal rioting that claimed more than 200 lives (Anifowose, 1982), and later in January 1966, the military struck and the fledging Nigerian democracy was thwarted by the action of its very own practitioners.

From 1966, the military held sway until 1979 when they handed over to another civilian government headed by Alhaji Shehu Shagari of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN). The Shagari-led government organized a civilian to civilian transition election but again, like its First Republic through very violent means of connivance with the election management body, Federal Election Commission (FEDECO) and security forces. That again set the stage for the second wave of military intervention in the nation's politics on December 31, 1983. The military from then remained in power until May 29, 1999 after several attempts of transition to civilian rule. Suffice it to say that between independence in 1960 and 1999 when civilian rule was restored, Nigeria produced only two elected governments and both were overthrown in military *coups d'etat*. Since the restoration of civil rule, attempts have not been made by politicians to deepen and strengthen democracy. Instead, Nigeria has only added to its history of fraudulent and violent elections. The

1999, 2003 and 2007 general elections that brought President Olusegun Obasanjo and later late President Umaru Yar'Adua to power were marred by such widespread violence and fraud. In the same vein, the 2003 elections were more pervasively and openly rigged than the flawed 1999 polls, and these events set the stage for the 2007 elections which both domestic and foreign observers succinctly described as the worst in Nigeria's history. Many forms of violence were recorded across the States in the 2011 general elections.

METHOD

This study attempts to examine The Punch and Nigerian Tribune newspapers' coverage of the 2011 electoral violence in Osun State. The research method adopted for this study was content analysis. Two newspapers – the Nigerian Tribune and Punch were analyzed from March 31 – May 4, 2011 editions on the coverage of the general election with particular reference to what happened in Osun State. A sample of 8 editions of both the Nigerian Tribune and Punch newspapers respectively were selected for this study. The study focuses on the magnitude of the coverage and the prominence of electoral violence during 2011 general elections. Sampling of the two newspapers (Nigeria Tribune and The Punch) were carried out within four weeks interval before, during and a week after the general elections for any possible electoral violence throughout the election period. The data obtained for this study were analysed using frequency distribution table and simple percentage.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows that the violence was given more coverage on April 19 and April 27 by The Nigerian Tribune newspaper. While both newspapers had the same coverage of the events on both April 23 and April 28, the Nigerian Tribune newspaper had more coverage than the Punch newspaper on April 19 and April 27. Between March 31 and April 18 witnessed the least coverage by The Nigerian Tribune newspaper, while The Punch newspaper had no coverage in the above mentioned dates. Table 2 shows that street fight and destruction of property had the highest coverage with (41%) , while Gun/shooting had (18%). Table 3 shows that the coverage of The Nigerian Tribune and Punch newspapers on the effect of the violence is as follows: loss of property (25%), rigging (17%), assassination (8%), loss of lives (17%), murder (8%), death (8%), and mortal injury (17%). The results indicate that the nature of news covered on the 2011 Osun State electoral violence by Nigerian Tribune and Punch Newspapers was more of electoral violence than other stories.

The study indicate that the personalities mentioned in the newspapers coverage of electoral violence during the 2011 general elections in Osun State were either portrayed as the agents of the organization conducting the election (INEC) or as the electorates vested with the civic right of voting. Table 4 shows that coverage of The Nigerian Tribune and Punch Newspapers on the election was more favourable to a party with 53%, while it was unfavourable to another with 13%, neutral was only 17%. Table 5 shows that the active formed the larger role of government in the violence as covered by both newspapers with 50%, followed by passive with 33%, neutral was only 17%. Table 6 shows the coverage

of Nigerian Tribune and Punch newspapers on the victims of the violence. The Nigerian Tribune covered more stories on electoral violence than Punch newspaper within the 4 weeks under review. Between the period of Tuesday, March -31 and Thursday, April – 28, 2011, the Nigerian Tribune newspaper had the total of 66.7% coverage on electoral violence while Punch newspaper only had 33.3% coverage on electoral violence. The coverage of the two newspapers focused more on electoral violence than other stories within the 4 weeks under review. Within this period, news on electoral violence were given more focus than other stories being a matter of national interest. Within the same period, the two newspapers covered other stories aside electoral violence but their coverage on the loss of property was higher than rigging, assassination and other effects of violence. The result of the election being unfavourable to some political parties resulted in electoral violence in which people’s lives and property were lost, however, the coverage of the two newspapers focused more on the loss of properties.

The coverage of the two newspapers indicated that government was active in its role of providing appropriate security to the people to safeguard their lives and property by deploying anti-riot armed policemen to guard all the polling centers where voting exercise was to be carried out, and to the areas where the violence was taking place. The major actors in the news coverage of the two newspapers indicated that news about politicians and political parties, being a matter of national interest were given more attention on the pages of the two newspapers than other contemporary stories within the period under review. The coverage of the two newspapers also revealed that the victims of the violence include the electorates, politicians, aspirants, government officials, press and others. However, the electorates and press suffered more from the violence and the aftermath effect of the violence produced public fear and apprehension.

Hence, the effect of public fear relatively greater than others. Gun shooting, street fight, hooliganism, free for all fight and destruction of property constituted the types of violence covered by the two newspapers within the period under review. However, street fight and destruction of property recorded higher magnitude than gun shooting. There were various clashes between party supporters and political thugs which degenerated to street fights, and people’s property were destroyed in the process. The newspapers reviewed did not give much prominence to the reporting of electoral violence, as the two newspapers only reported twelve times on electoral violence in Osun State throughout the period of the elections. This is contrary to the meaning of news according to Hodgson (1984) that “events, no matter how significant they are, there would be no news until they are reported to the public”.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Considering the nature of the electoral violence, especially at the first quarter of the year 2011, one would expect the news of the electoral violence to be a running one in many editions of any reputable medium in the country. All newspapers available in the country were effective in the publishing of news concerning this brutal electoral violence. However, the two newspapers content analyzed in this study failed to give detailed reports of the

2011 electoral violence in Osun State, despite that people deserved to know. Only two editions of the newspapers analyzed carried the violence as a cover story. It was also discovered that much of the coverage was interviews, which shows that the Nigerian media rely more on interviews for its source of information than other news sources that are credible. Electoral violence is sparsely reported in Nigerian newspapers and when they do, politicians and political parties get more mentioned than any other. Reporters should be trained on how to cover electoral violence without getting wounded themselves or becoming victims; accurate reportage of violence may help our electoral system. However, corrupt or paid reportage where news are bought and sponsored or killed, all in the name of ownership factor and godfatherism should be discouraged.

Table 1: Days of Coverage

Days of coverage	Nigerian Tribune	The Punch	Total (%)
Tuesday, March – 31	1	-	1
Monday, April – 18	1	-	1
Tuesday, April – 19	2	1	3
Saturday, April – 23	1	1	2
Wednesday, April – 27	2	1	3
Thursday, April – 28	1	1	2
Total	8	4	12

Source: Literature Review, March 31 - April 28, 2011

Table 2: Types of violence

Types of violence	Nigerian Tribune	The Punch	Total (%)
Gun/shooting	2	-	2(18)
Street fight/hooliganism/free for all fight	3	2	5(41)
Manslaughter	-	-	-
Arson	-	-	-
Destruction of properties	3	2	5(4)
Others	-	-	-
Total	8	4	12(100)

Source: Literature Review, March 31 - April 28, 2011

Table 3: Effect of violence

Effect of violence	Nigerian Tribune	The Punch	Total (%)
Loss of properties	2	1	3(25)
Rigging	1	1	2(17)
Assassination	1	-	1(8)
Molestation	-	-	-
Loss of lives	1	1	2(17)
Murder	1	-	1(8)
Deaths	1	-	1(8)
Mortal injury	1	1	2(17)
Total	8	4	12(100)

Source: Literature Review, March 31 - April 28, 2011

Table 4: Tone of the stories

Tone of story	Nigerian Tribune	The Punch	Total (%)
Neutral	1	1	2(17)
Favourable	5	1	6(53)
Unfavourable	2	2	4(33)
Total	8	4	12(100)

Source: Literature Review, March 31 - April 28, 2011

Table 5: Role of government in the violence as covered by The Nigerian Tribune and Punch newspaper

Role of Government	Nigerian Tribune	The Punch	Total (%)
Active	4	2	6(50)
Passive	3	1	4(33)
Neutral	1	1	2(17)
Total	8	4	12(100)

Source: Literature Review, March 31 - April 28, 2011

Table 6: Victims as covered by the Nigerian Tribune and Punch newspapers.

Victims	Nigerian Tribune	The Punch	Total (%)
Electorates	3	1	4(33)
Politicians	-	-	-
Aspirants	2	1	3(25)
Government Officials	-	-	-
INEC Officials	1	-	1(9)
Press	2	2	4(33)
Security	-	-	-
Students	-	-	-
Others	-	-	-
Total	8	4	12(100)

Source: Literature Review, March 31 - April 28, 2011

Table 7: Showing aftermath of violence

Aftermath of the violence	Nigerian Tribune	The Punch	Total (%)
Public fear	4	1	5(40)
Fatherless/Motherless children	2	1	3(24)
Economic reduction	1	1	2(18)
Nullification of election result	1	1	2(18)
Total	8	4	12(100)

Source: Literature Review, March 31 - April 28, 2011

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