

## Newspaper Coverage of the Impact of G5 Governors in Nigeria

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### **Abstract**

*This paper is an exploration of the way newspapers report the activities of the G5 governors in Nigeria. The paper shows from previous studies that the media is a crucial part of the democratic process in that almost everything that happens within the political circle is projected or deemphasized by the media. The media have the tendency to make a political idea or candidate popular and the G5 governors are well aware of this fact and are utilizing this advantage significantly. It is however important to note that this awareness and utilization of the media seem not to have garnered the needed benefit which is to ensure the removal of the PDP national chairman. However, the G5 movement seems to have posed a challenge to the political focus of the PDP as it has led to a division of supporters on loyal lines.*

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### **Introduction**

The channels or vehicles used to transmit ideas, emotions, and information from the source to the receiver are known as mass media. Most times the audience of the mass media is usually heterogeneous. The Mass media are classified into two broad groups and they include the print and electronic media. This study is however focused on newspaper reports.

Ojebuyi (2012) as cited in Ojebuyi and Ekennia (2013) remarked that "the mass media are seen as sacrosanct institutions that serve the democratic process". Reconstructing, interpreting, and reporting on problems that arise in human society According to Norris (1995), cited by Vreese (2005), the media not only describe, explain, and interpret events, but they also give the public a platform from which to view social reality. The public pays more attention to some events than others. Examples of these more attention-grabbing occurrences include disasters, wars, conflicts, toxic reactions, and scandals of all stripes. As a result, media professionals always have a higher chance of choosing and covering some events before others (Watson, 2003; Schwarz, 2009).

Politics typically account for a sizable portion of media material in a democratic nation like Nigeria. The way these political conflicts are covered in the media has a significant impact on the ruling party. "Many intense political disputes affect the thinking about the mass media, and these conflicts shaped the development of mass media society theory," claimed Barom and Davis

(2009, p. 28).

Political opposition refers to a situation in which one or more political parties, other than the one in power, are vying for control of the government in a certain area, state, or nation (New World College Dictionary, 2010). As of January 2014, the People's Democratic Party's was the leading political party and their main rival was the All Progressive Congress (APC) and other opposition parties until the APC eventually took over power in 2015 at the national level. The PDP's grasp on power was broken by the APC and this marked the beginning of a new political era after 15 years. This victory gave political parties the hope that national victory is a possibility.

A political party, according to Likoti (2005), cited in Lamid (2015), is a formally organized collection of people with shared political objectives and viewpoints that seeks to influence governmental decision-making by supporting a candidate for office. Burke (2015) defines a political party as a group of people who have come together to advance specific shared beliefs. In the political conflict, the media is an important player. Political parties typically use it as a platform to discuss their beliefs and ideologies, which they contend will better serve the interests of the people than those of other parties. Therefore, having a print publication or broadcast outlet (television or radio) that supports its cause is of enormous benefit to a political party.

The All Progressive Congress (APC), which has been the central ruling party in Nigeria since 2015, counts *The Nation* newspaper as one of its primary supporters (Onwude, Nnomeh, Chima, & Obayi 2017). The ownership of the media dictates who controls the media content, and such considerations also influence the kind of information that is published. Owning a media outlet entails having total legal authority over its operation. In a democratic nation like Nigeria, the media house may be held by the government or a private person through legal control. It is in the face of such ownership and media control patterns that this study seeks to look into the coverage of the G5 governors by newspapers in Nigeria. This became necessary in the light of the fact that media coverage is not innocent of underlying meaning and interest hence coverage can reveal perspectives that underlie newspaper idiosyncrasies and editorial focus. The aim of the paper is to explore perspectives to the reportage of the G5 governors.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The Nigerian mass media serve as platforms for the spread of messages and information, although they tend to garner greater attention when it comes to stories about conflict, crime, and political upheaval. Media ownership can sometimes limit the content of the media since it appears that political parties use outlets that support them to spread ideas that are critical of the current administration. Unfortunately, a number of these media outlets are owned by people who seem to be supporters of the ruling party or the opposing party hence the issue of ownership and editorial interest confronts newspaper houses which in turn affect the quality of their reports.

### **Literature Review**

#### **The G5 Governors**

This is made up of 5 governors from the PDP agitated for the developments in the party since the conclusion of the Presidential primaries that led to the emergence of Alhaji Atiku Abubakar as the party's candidate. The G5 governors led by the Rivers State governor, Nyesom Ezenwo Wike includes Seyi Makinde of Oyo, Samuel Ortom of Benue, Okezie Ikpeazu of Abia, and Ifeanyi

Ugwuanyi of Enugu (*TheCable* November 24, 2022). The emergence of this coalition of governors has generated so many controversies as to the chances of the People's Democratic Party winning the general elections. The governors have been at the forefront of calls for Iyorchia Ayu to step down as national chairman of the PDP, on the grounds that the presidential candidate and chairman cannot be from the same region (*TheCable* November 24, 2022).

### **Factors Affecting Media Coverage in Nigeria**

Government-owned and -controlled media, political party newspapers, and privately owned press were all present under the First Republic. This was the issue in the years 1960–1966. Media coverage of ongoing national concerns, including the Census, election campaigns, regional, and ethnic group crises, among others, was heavily influenced by media ownership. The media offers notable instances of partisanship, irresponsibility, and extreme partisanship. The census crises were a pivotal moment in the series of political crises that beguiled the first republic. It was the seed of mutually distinct, innig battles and mending confrontation between regional media and federal media on the one hand and between the various regional media and political party newspaper on the other hand. It ignited an acrimonious interethnic conflict and divided the political establishment on long-standing ethnic and regional frontlines. This not only paved the way for the contentious 1964 federal elections and the ensuing constitutional declaration, but it also violently brought about the fall of the first republic as different regional governments used their media to wage war on one another.

The conflict between the Northern and Eastern areas was one example (1973). The Ibo were criticized by the authorities of the Northern Region for inflating their population during the census and then returning to the region to continue to exert influence. The Northern People's Congress (NPC) leaders were labeled "Childish" by the Eastern government-owned media in response. It continued by stating that they could not afford the dissolution of the republic due to their lack of access to food, inadequate education, terrible governance, and primitive way of life. According to Olayiwola (1999), the Military believed that free newspaper circulation and other media transmission would pose a threat to their administration, thus they issued a variety of decrees to censor the media. Despite this order, the media continued to discuss many of the wrongs committed by the military regime. It is accurate to argue that the media helped create the groundwork for the overthrow of the incorrect administration by reporting on official viewpoints, criticizing them, and expressing their own discontent. Despite the administration's efforts to appear humane, the Babangida regime issued many laws to limit political coverage of events by the media. Journalists were imprisoned, and publications and magazines were ordered to be read only in certain places.

Olayiwola (1999) went on to say that during the sectional republic, after the elected officials had been sworn in, the ruling political parties at the federal and state levels had taken over ownership and control of the print and electronic media within their purviews. In his opinion, this situation contributed to the escalation of old ethnic animosities, and the atmosphere of political communication was rife with acrimonious rivalry and hostility. The media was in a new position to inform the public about the difficulties of the new presidential system of government, but it also became thoroughly enmeshed in partisan politics.

One political party was openly sponsored by the media against another. The media were

rendered ineffective and unable to fulfill their duties of educating, informing, and entertaining the people as a result of their biased political coronation. One of the causes of the demise of the second republic in December 1983 was this. By the time the 1983 election campaigns got underway, it was challenging to tell the dominant political parties and the media that supported them apart. There have been claims that many members of the mass media at this time were bought off. Some allegedly interpreted news and events from the perspective of their political mentors, while others purported to attend press conferences and produce press releases that never materialized. These events, along with a number of others, caused the second republic to implode, and the military eventually intervened once more. Of course, the military government that followed also suffered from terrible writing skills, which ultimately resulted in civilian rule in 1999.

Meanwhile, it is impossible to overstate the importance of media coverage of various elections since 1999. From the pre-election to the post-election periods, the electioneering process has seen both sides of the coin of media coverage. The privately owned media are doing poorly in their operations, while the government-run media have been following the owners' instructions. All that can be seen at this point is that opposition candidate election campaigns are not being covered by state-owned media, and their jingles are not being played on their stations.

### **Newspaper and the Construction of Reality**

News reporting is centrally concerned with the construction of social reality and the representation of dominant discourses in a society. This becomes even more imperative in the print industry where reporters have greater opportunity of preserving permanently records of social events and of becoming more objective and detached in the expression of ideas and views. The role of the media in the construction of reality and how people view the world around them has received critical and evaluative studies in media research over the years (Alkazemi, 2012; Adoni & Mane, 1984; Alexander, 1981). The construction of reality considers the processes by which social, political and ideological meanings are framed, processed and carried through the news media. Typically, researchers tend to focus on how media represents social reality; manages social change; and affects the well-being of audiences.

The impacts of the ideological contents of the media that attempt to reflect back the dominant discourses circulating in the society or in the newsroom have particularly been examined (Richardson, 2007). According to Rogers, Kenix and Thorson (2007; cited in Alkazemi, 2012), media texts can play a role in the creation and circulation of ideological meanings, through the subtlety of information presentation to audiences. The meanings portrayed, the authors argue, can find associations with gender, age, ethnicity and emotional stereotypes, reinforcing them either positively or negatively. Thus, theoretical media research has found support for the positive and negative effects of meanings on audiences, mediated through the media. Also, there is the understanding that no two papers can approach social realities exactly the same way, as circumstances, rather than statistics, often inform a number of press constructions of social narratives (Peelo *et al.*, 2004).

Newspapers' framing of reality, just like in other media forms, have traditionally been constructed along three broad ideological traditions: conservatism, liberalism and democratic traditions. However, as noted by Gamson *et al.* (1992), it is difficult to find anyone paper that

could claim to approach these ideals perfectly. However, the different ideological traditions do provide a many-voiced and open text that can and has often been read oppositionally by newspaper audiences as they attempt to understand and respond to social realities (Gamson *et al.*, 1992). Nigerian newspapers also have quite a few things that make them different from one another. Ideological likeness and unlikeness are factors that shape their representation of reality. Most dominant ones support the ideology of free enterprise with occasional interference by the state to stabilize the socio-political economy. When this liberal posture takes on conservativeness, it tends to support the status quo, especially when the term is defined as a regime of the ruling elite who control the biggest share of the nation's socio-political and economic resources to the detriment of the subaltern segment.

It appears *The Guardian* passed the test as a liberal newspaper during the military regime of MohammaduBuhari (1983-1985) and that of his successor, Ibrahim Babangida (1985-1992). During Buhari's time, reporters were jailed on the heel of a draconian Decree 4 of 1984 while a lot of harassment of reporters of *The Guardian* newspaper took place. The harassment came to a head during the regime of Sani Abacha (1993-1998) when Alex Ibru, the largest equity holder of the newspaper, escaped an assassination attempt. *The Guardian's* editorial content had supported liberal views which opposed the authoritarian system of the military dictators. *The Sun* newspaper does not have that history as it came into existence only two years after Nigeria reverted to democratic rule in 1999; but it still depicts liberality in its coverage in the form of sensationalism. Beyond the liberal-conservative argument as a factor of reality representation are the ownership structure and editorial positions.

The most visible newspapers have ownership dominated by the male folks. Editorial positions of most national newspapers in Nigeria are also dominated by men as typified by the cliché "Gentlemen of the Press." This is not just a fact but a historical one. Ever since the missionary Henry Townsend produced the *IweIrohin*, media ownership has always been skewed against women and it wouldn't make any difference which category it is – private or public. Government-owned newspapers in Nigeria, in most cases, appoint men to represent them in the boards of directors.

The ownership of *The Sun* and *The Guardian*, the two newspapers under scrutiny, has always been male-dominated. The case of *The Guardian* changed a bit in 2011 when Maiden Ibru resumed as the publisher of *The Guardian* after the death of her husband founder, Alex. Also, the first list of 25 editorial positions occupied by Nigerian women provided by Sanusi and Adelabu (2015) over a period of 40 years shows only three women – Amman Ogan, Harriet Laurence and Maiden Ibru – appearing for *The Guardian* and none from *The Sun*. In their second list of four editorial positions, none appeared for either *The Guardian* or *The Sun*. However, in the non-editorial sector (graphics, press hall, photography, newsroom production, etc.) of the two newspapers, women are visible; though it appears *The Guardian* has a more preponderant scenario than *The Sun*. *The Sun* is not totally bereft of females as its online editor is a woman as of 2018. The advent of the Internet has also elicited the increased ownership of women for news sites and blogs and it appears the trend of increment will go on for a long time.

The ownership and editorial positions exist within the remit of socio-political and cultural environment which shape the way newspapers portray social realities. These owners and editors

have their religious beliefs, political beliefs, social circles and the like. *The Guardian*, in its websites, claims it is not politically affiliated and reports fairly and objectively as a clear demonstration of its social responsibility credential in the build-up to a just society. The case of *The Sun* is different as its founder and majority shareholder, UzohKalu, has been seen publicly supporting the current Buhari's civilian regime, a regime known for its hard lining. These theoretical specificities are essentially important. They can help us understand the kind of socio-political factors that operate to shape the framing of public narratives by women and how the chosen orientation of each newspaper can affect readers' responses to social realities, based on the news stories presented before them.

### **Agenda Setting Theory**

This study situated its theoretical perspective on the Agenda setting theory. The term agenda-setting as coined by McCombs and Shaw (1972, 1973) describes a phenomenon which had long been noticed and studied in the context of press coverage of issue. The core idea is that the news media indicate to the public what the main issues of the day are and this is reflected in what the public perceives as the main issues.

McComb and Shaw (1974) assert that when a topic is heavily covered in the media, it motivates viewers to value it highly as well. By placing news articles on specific pages, using specific headline sizes, and publishing them frequently, the media gave them a set amount of weight. According to the agenda setting theory, the public learns about these important topics from the news media and incorporates a similar balance of priority and weight into their own personal agenda. Folarin (2002) concurred that the mass media have an influence on agenda setting since they have the power to select or highlight particular issues, leading the general public to view the issue or topic as significant. This suggests that what matters are prioritized in a society at a given time is predetermined by the media.

Through this agenda-setting function, the print media can, in addition to giving information about the political process, impose status and legitimacy on political figures and issues, making them seem significant and 'correct'. This clarified why the print media actively promotes the most crucial topic, with which the general public is most intimately identified.

In a study titled "Nigerian press coverage of 2007 presidential election campaigns," Eze (2010) used Agenda Setting theory as his theoretical framework to support his findings. In this regard, his study is comparable to this study because both studies sought to gauge the amount of media attention given to a specific political issue.

Setting an agenda is based on two basic presumptions:

- 1) The press and media filter and shape reality rather than reflecting it.
- 2) The focus of the media on a small number of topics and issues causes the public to prioritize certain topics over others.

Based on the foregoing and in accordance with the agenda setting theory, it is the most appropriate theory that can explain the results of this study based on the research problem and how the two selected newspapers (Leadership and Daily Trust newspaper) could have been seen as significantly promoting the issue of the defection of the five PDP Governors to APC as a

matter of public interest, as postulated by the agenda setting theory.

Because of this, Okunna (1999, Pp. 121–122) noted that the print media can improve a political candidate's standing in a number of ways: The media can give the preferred candidate larger headlines; the media can feature more lead stories on the candidate; through placement, the media can give articles on the candidate more prominent positions; the media can print more quotes from the candidate's speech; photographs and other prominence-enhancing strategies.

### **Framing Theory**

This theory is the brain child of Erving Goffman in 1974. The term "framing" here refers to the way that the mass media provide a specific aspect of a problem through selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration (Scheufele & Iyengar, 2010 quoted in Okoro & Odoemelam) (2013). This implies that the objectives of the reporter or the media outlet they work for are used to frame the content of every channel. In a similar vein, framing is conceptualized by Chew, Ahmad, Ibrahim, and Chang (2012) as a model that is focused on the presentation of media contents. According to the framing theory, during the news collecting and production process, reporters highlight some parts of reality while foregrounding others (Goffman, 1974). Accordingly, framing can be done by reporters and the media organizations for which they work in a deliberate or unconscious manner. It makes sense that Kuyers (2006) described framing as the act of media practitioners creating a certain point of view that enables the facts of a given situation to be seen in a particular way, with some facts highlighted to be more obvious than others. It is important to note that the media has developed into society's eyes because people rely so much on the information provided by daily media coverage to guide their decisions. Because the media is considered as being present everywhere and accumulating information for the general public, any information that predominates in the various media is accepted seriously by society (especially those who have direct access to these media).

As a result, media frames transform into societal frames, turning the journalist into a visionary for society. The trend is established by what the media continuously reports and how they display it. Therefore, framing is crucial because it influences how society views life in general. This is thus because every fact or piece of information is neutral until it is framed, and framing depends on the reporter's or the media outlet's point of view. Gitlin (1980:7 cited in Ikon 2016) made the case that media frames are the precise method by which symbol handlers consistently manage both verbal and visual discourses, including the selection, accentuation, and presentation of stories for general consumption. The reporter, who serves as the first gatekeeper, chooses what is reported as news and how it should be reported. Regardless of the perspective the reporter chooses to report from, that news coverage becomes the frame, and exposure to it results in learning that is consistent with the frames that structure the coverage (Baran & Davis, 2009).

The agenda setting theory and the framing theory follow a similar line of reasoning; in fact, McCombs, Shaw, and Weaver (1997) proposed that agenda setting and framing effects are not only connected, but that framing is actually an extension of agenda setting. The impact of important media coverage characteristics on viewers' interpretations of these news stories was described using the phrase "second level agenda shaping." Terkidsen & Schnell (1997) assert that the theory of framing holds that texts, in themselves, can be arranged or presented in

multiple fashions and as such influence citizens and ensure issue considerations and level of policy/public support. Agenda setting, on the other hand, describes which issues will enter the public domain and how they may later influence political judgment.

The implication of this theory on the study is that media framing can douse or ignite conflicts such as protests and lead to the loss of lives and properties.

Individuals depend on the information provided by the media to make well-informed decisions, therefore Bara and Davis (2009) argue that framing theory implies that media consumers relate the information they learn from the media to their own experiences. Simply said, since some people rely on the media to draw judgments, it is the responsibility of the media to present events from unbiased viewpoints.

### **Empirical Studies**

The prominence given to political conflicts was examined in a study by Ojebuyi and Ekennia (2013) titled "Godfatherism ownership influence and media treatment of political influence in Oyo State, Nigeria," which also made the assertion that ownership affiliations of newspapers affected how these political conflicts are reported and presented. The study was presented using content analysis to find patterns, make claims regarding particular media contents, and identify communication media trends over a specified time period. This research question tries to determine how much prominence or relevance the chosen newspapers gave the topic of political dispute under investigation. The newspaper's placement of the reports on the front page, editorial page, rear page, and inside page is used to gauge the issue of prominence. The above categories are ordered sequentially according to relevance, with the first holding the highest level of importance and the final, the least amount of value (Ojobeyi & Ekennia, 2013).

Another study by Nwaokafor and Okunoye, "Media Power in Elections: Evidence of Agenda Setting Theory in Political Communication in Nigeria Evolving Democracy" (2013) aimed to evaluate the influence of the media during elections and offered proof of the part agenda-setting plays in Nigerian political communication. Following their study, the researchers showed how the media's influence, particularly during elections, had a favorable impact on the parties and groups of individuals who were exposed to the content. The study examined agenda-setting research and how it can change how the general public views the significance of certain topics (saliency) during an electioneering campaign. Looking at the general election in Nigeria in April 2011, it is clear from the data gathered both during and after the results were announced that the Nigerian media, especially the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), used its ability to reach a large audience in a short amount of time to influence the audience by not only informing them of what news item or issue is crucial to believe but also by advising them on how to evaluate the candidates based on their leadership abilities (Nwaokafor & Okunoye, 2013).

Focusing on political actors during the 1996 presidential election, Kioussis & McCombs (2004) employed a straightforward yet illuminating model in their article "Agenda-Setting Effects and Attitude Strength: Political Figures During the 1996 Presidential Election." Over the period of five months, the study counted news articles that featured eleven (11) politicians. It then compared the volume of coverage to public opinion polls that were directed towards each candidate. The study discovered relationships between politicians' surveyed approval ratings and

the quantity of attention certain politicians received in major newspapers. Generally speaking, a politician with greater media attention has a higher approval rating than a politician with less media attention. However, the study did not look at these political leaders in relation to the actions of their political parties or how the media covered such issues. The G5 governors seem to be enjoying high media coverage.

Media coverage of political scandals is examined by Marion and Crigler (2014) in "Media Coverage of Political Scandals: Addressing Concerns about Personalization." The study looked at whether political scandals also exhibit the personalizing that is so remarkable in the coverage of individual scandals. The study is concerned that focusing too much on individuals may obstruct efforts at political reform and crowd out investigations into institutional failings. It hypothesizes that consideration of personal and institutional aspects in news coverage of scandals broadens or narrows the area of debate, drawing on prior literature on scandals and attribution of responsibility. The analysis discovered that news outlets treated the controversies surrounding Abu Ghraib, Benghazi, NSA/Snowden, and Sexual Assault in the Military in a largely consistent manner. However, both institutional and personal levels of argument are included. Bipartisan media (like FOX news) and media that are not based in the United States help to moderate the media consensus. Political controversies are covered in news in partisan and international media, which gives audiences a different perspective.

### Data Presentation

Headline	Newspaper	Discussion
G5 governors: Enemies of progress frustrating PDP's quest for presidency	<i>The Cable</i> newspaper online	This report is favourable to the G5 governors as it presented them as victims of attack and not the mole within the party as some people will see them
G5 Governors in Enugu: What is driving us, by Ortom	<i>Vanguard</i> Newspaper	this article explained the reasons for the break-out of the G5 governors as patriotism, integrity, equity, fairness and justice

### Conclusion

This paper shows from previous studies that the media is a crucial part of the democratic process in that almost everything that happens within the political circle is projected or deemphasized by the media. The media have the tendency to make a political idea or candidate popular and the G5 governors are well aware of this fact and are utilizing this advantage significantly. It is however important to note that this awareness and utilization of the media seem not to have garnered the needed benefit which is to ensure the removal of the PDP national chairman. However, the G5 movement seems to have posed a challenge to the political focus of the PDP as it has led to a division of supporters on loyal lines. Newspapers have helped in popularizing the G5 agenda to the popularity of the agitated governors yet it is arguable that it has won sympathy to the presidential candidate, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar who some people think is being unduly

pressurized; the debate is still ongoing.

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