

# Newspapers' Framing and Reportage of Illegal Usage of Arms during Elections in Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

*No doubt, arms and weapons have become the principal driving force of most electioneering and elections in Nigeria. The linkages between the arms and weapons have greatly subverted the development of democracy. Politicians have in the past provided arms and weapons to privately funded militias who wielded these arms and weapons as tools to intimidate opposition politicians and supporters during electioneering campaigns and elections. This study investigated the newspapers' framing and reportage of illegal use of arms during 2015 general elections in Nigeria. It adopted cross-sectional descriptive research design with the entire editions of the national publications of Tribune, This Day and Punch newspapers from November 16, 2014 to March 27, 2015 content analyzed with the aid of coding sheets. The analysis carried out revealed that the three national newspapers had different ways through which they report proliferation of illegal arms during the 2015 general elections. The study recommends that as watch-dogs and the fourth estate of the realm of the society, print media practitioners should endeavour to give equal attention to all crises inherent during an election.*

**Keywords:** Framing, Reportage, Newspapers, Illegal arms, Elections, Nigeria

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, politics is militarized and voting is used as an electoral tool, leading to the inculcation of a culture of violence in the society especially during political campaign. Armed groups are not a new phenomenon. However, today's armed groups are better armed, better trained and increasingly sophisticated in their actions than some of the law enforcement officers. Armed groups hired by politicians have now developed and have begun to use these arms for their selfish interests (Bah, 2004). It is also clear that this issue of illegal arms' use to some extent has undermined the participation of citizens in electoral activities including campaign process. Armed groups hired by politicians have now developed their own economic bases thereby freeing themselves from political patrons. This has led some groups to engage in political process themselves. Armed violence is about access to resources, whether through committing crimes, playing on communal tensions, stealing oil, or winning elections (Bah, 2004).

The mass media plays a vital role in awareness of the public by promoting good political campaigns during electioneering, maintenance of peace in the democratic process and good governance. Through the media, the voice of the people, awareness campaigns on arms proliferation, as well as their thoughts on political issues are resonated (Meyer,

2014). The print media has the capacity to create awareness and knowledge about issues of national interest. Contextually, the media have the responsibility to mobilize for national development. In other words, social mobilization for development largely depends on the media for success. Crusade for change and dissemination of useful information against corruption, illegal arms use, bad governance and terrorism depend on the print media. Illegal arms use is considered at present a challenge to both national and international peace. It has become an issue of increasing concern among the international community because of its ability to fuel and sustain conflicts, violence, insurgency and terrorist activities, which constitutes great impediment to security and sustainable development (Malam, 2014).

The role of the media in every society is often to educate, inform and enlighten. It is assumed that, where those roles are adequately carried out, elections are bound to be free and fair. However, in Nigeria, several elections have been conducted in the country which had resulted in the question of how the media had portrayed cases of illegal use of arms, it appeared that scanty literature is available to look at the way newspapers portray the problem of illegal arms use most especially during elections. It is along this perspective that this study seeks to investigate newspaper portrayal of use of arms during 2015 general elections in Nigeria in order to spur the interest of key stakeholders and policy makers in tackling the problem of illegal use of arms during electioneering and general elections in Nigeria.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

(i) To determine the patterns of portrayal of coverage on illegal use of arms by Tribune, This Day and Punch newspapers, given their ownerships structure during 2015 general elections in Nigeria.

(ii) To examine policy recommendations advanced by Tribune, This Day and Punch and Punch newspapers in curbing illegal use of arms during 2015 general elections in Nigeria.

## 3.0 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

(i) Are there differences in the patterns of portrayal of reports on illegal use of arms by *Tribune*, *This*

*Day* and *Punch* newspapers, given their ownerships structure during 2015 general elections in Nigeria?

(ii) How do the policy recommendations advanced by *Tribune*, *This Day* and *Punch* newspapers help in curbing illegal use of arms and political violence during 2015 general elections in Nigeria?

## 4.0 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study only covered illegal use of arms during the 2015 general elections. Also, three Nigerian national newspapers Tribune, This Day and Punch were analyzed based on their ownerships structure, national spread and record of existence as at the period of study. The study examined these selected newspapers' weekdays and weekend editions between November 15, 2014 and March 27, 2015 which fell within the electoral campaign window frame.

This study examined how the selected newspapers framed and reported use of illegal arms during 2015 general elections which dominated the news coverage and editorials during the period under review. In addition, the study also examined aspects of editorial policy of the three selected daily newspapers over a period of five months, to determine the policy recommendations advanced to help in curbing illegal use of arms during 2015 general elections in Nigeria.

## 5.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

This study is situated within two theoretical frameworks - **Media Intrusion Theory** and **News Production Research Theory**.

### 5.1 Media Intrusion Theory:

This is another body of recent research dealing with political communication. It is not a clearly articulated set of ideas but rather exists as a loosely connected set of assumptions underlying a broad range of empirical research in political science and communication. Media intrusion theorists frequently cite the findings of the news production researchers to support their positions. They claim that political reports are too personalized, too dramatized, and too fragmented. Politics is often reported as a game between opposing teams, with the major politicians viewed as star players (Baran and Davis, 2012). Stories focus on media-hyped spectacles—on big plays, on life-and-death struggles to score points. These reports don't help news consumers—in other words, citizens—

develop useful understandings of politics. They don't systematically inform people about issues and how candidates would deal with issues. Rather, they encourage consumers to become political spectators, content to sit on the sidelines while the stars play the game (Strupp, 2004).

#### **5.1.1 Strengths of Media Intrusion Theory**

1. Provides basis for social change
2. Raises important questions about operation of news media organizations (Baran and Davis, 2012)

#### **5.1.2 Weaknesses**

1. Focuses on operation of news media but has not empirically demonstrated its effect
2. Has overly pessimistic view of news media and their social role
3. Focuses too much on intrusion into politics
4. Is based on elite pluralism assumptions (Baran and Davis, 2012)

### **5.2 News Production Research**

During the past four decades, several studies have been conducted on the production and consumption of news content. Their purpose was to critically analyze how journalists routinely cover news. Most of this research supports theories about the intrusion of media into politics as well as cultural commodification theories (Baran and Davis, 2012).

#### **5.2.1 Strengths**

1. Provides recommendations for potentially useful changes in news production practices
2. Raises important questions about routine news production practices
3. Can be used to study production of many different types of news (Baran and Davis, 2012)

#### **5.2.2 Weaknesses**

1. Focuses on news production practices but has not empirically demonstrated their effect
2. Has pessimistic view of journalists and their social role
3. Has been ignored and rejected as impractical by practicing journalists (Baran and Davis, 2012)

### **5.3 Relevance of Theories to the Study**

These theories - **Media Intrusion Theory** and **News Production Research Theory** are diverse but provide a surprisingly coherent and complementary vision of contemporary Nigerian society. Even though they are grounded in post positivist research, they have produced research findings demonstrating that media have moderate effects (Baran and Davis, 2012).

Media might tell people what to talk about (spiral of silence) when they discuss issues with others. However, media can have a profound influence on the accessibility and quality of information we use as we try to think, talk, and act in our social world. If the only information we can easily access is the information provided in "infotainment" or political spectacle, or if it is limited to a small range of agreed-upon legitimate (and legitimized) issues and perspectives, there will be many important things we never learn about from the media. Moreover, our impressions of the things that we do learn about might be strongly affected by the "packaging" of the information (Baran and Davis, 2012).

## **6.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **6.1 Newspaper**

Newspaper is a printed unbound paper that contains news about current political, economic, socio-cultural, educational, environmental, scientific-cum-technological and sundry affairs as well as other relevant sales information. However, the evolution of electronic communication and migration of newspapers onto websites and blogs has rendered this term obsolete. Although the political cartoon belongs to the editorial pages of the traditional newspaper, nowadays the vast majority of political cartoons can be found on the internet. Newspaper refers to a daily or weekly publication used to disseminate news to a mass audience. This is why it is defined as an unbound printed publication issued at regular intervals which presents information in words, often supplemented with pictures (Adetola and Abioye, 2020).

However, the implication is that a typical newspaper is characterizes as follows:

- (1) Unlike most bounded publications, newspapers are hardly bounded.
- (2) Like all other print media modes, the content of newspapers is usually permanent to the extent that you can enjoy repeated exposure as long as you can preserve a specific edition of a newspaper.
- (3) It includes a wide range of political, financial, social, environmental, scientific, technological and multidisciplinary interests.
- (4) Periodically available that could be daily, weekly or bi-weekly.

- (5) It is widely covered (Adetola and Oluyi, 2020).

Newspapers are an important platform of mass communication as they reach every nook and cranny of the world where electronic media fails to reach. It plays a pivotal role in providing authentic firsthand information, building opinions, updating the knowledge of the reader, and serves as a good platform for advertisers to promote their products. (Adetola and Abioye, 2020). The function of the media is to help individuals uncover the truth by teaching them on public problems and presenting all kinds of proof as background to expose wrongdoing in society, hoping to make it a better place to reside in (Adetola and Oluyi, 2020).

### **6.2 Illegal Arms**

Proliferation of small arms and light weapons is one of the so many threats that currently plague Nigeria and its democratic process. This challenge has become a dreaded monster and has remained deep seated despite the mounting support from international, regional and even local efforts to mitigate it, resulting in the loss of many lives and destruction of physical infrastructure within several states. These contemporary security challenges, including small arms proliferation, and the consequences or effects that they precede are obviously detrimental to the development of the Nigerian state. Small arms and light weapons proliferation are capable of aggravating conflict during electioneering campaign in Nigeria. As a result, the media including the print, press and social media has prominent roles to play by creating awareness and sensitizing the populace on the menace of the conflict created by the proliferation of arms and light weapons in Nigeria (Omenugha, 2015).

Ostensibly, the 1959 Firearms Act was enacted to check the increasingly rate of arms proliferation in Nigeria towards independence. The failure of the Nigerian government to execute a comprehensive disarmament and arms destruction programme after the civil war (1967-1970) exacerbated the proliferation of guns and illicit arms trafficking. There is fear that a larger percentage of the SALW in circulation in Nigeria are illicit or illegal. Some of these illicit SALW were used in armed violence such as ethnic- religious conflicts, communal clashes, sectarian violence, cultism, political violence, electoral violence, vigilantism, militancy

and criminality. Thus, the proliferation of SALW in Nigeria has a destabilizing effect (Omenugha, 2015).

There is lack of capacity and strong legal or effective institutional frameworks to regulate SALW and combat the phenomenon of SALW proliferation in Nigeria, particularly Northern part of Nigeria. More fundamentally, the Nigerian state is yet to deal with the demand factors of SALW proliferation preferring to dwell on the symptoms rather than the root causes. The demand factors are the root causes of SALW proliferation, because if there is no demand there will be no supply (The Guardian, 2018).

Nigeria is the source, transit and destination of SALW, and therefore the demand factors include mass unemployment, poverty, corruption, excessive militarization, failure of political leadership, mis-governance, bad leadership, poor governance, state violence, among others. There is indeed excess politicization, state-sponsored violence and state proliferation of SALW leading to political violence, electoral violence and other forms of violence. For example, virtually all the law enforcement or security agencies are allowed to carry arms with exemption of few that are even lobbying to be allowed to carry weapons, thus militarizing the society more. In fact, the Nigerian state was not been able to deal with these demand factors (Omenugha, 2015).

## **7.0 METHODOLOGY**

### **7.1 Research Design**

The study focused on the framing and reportage of use of illegal arms during 2015 general elections in selected Nigerian newspapers. As such, the study adopted mixed research method. Therefore, content analysis (under the descriptive research design) and textual analysis were adopted for the purpose of collecting data in order to achieve the various research questions raised in the study.

### **7.2 Population of the Study**

The population of the study consists of the entire publication of Tribune, This Day and Punch newspapers. Hence, publications from November 16, 2014 to March 27, 2015 constituted the population of this study.

### **7.3 Sample and Sampling Techniques**

The entire editions of the newspapers within November 16, 2014 and March 27, 2015 were studied while the motive to study the total editions



(census), was based on the assertion that, since the period for the study is within a short period of time, the entire content could be studied so as to ensure reliability of data.

#### 7.4 Content Categories

The study adopted the categorization by:

1. Portrayal of events: This was to show whether there are differences in the portrayal of these events, incidents, actors and policies by three newspapers, given their different locations and ownership.
2. Policy recommendations advanced by the newspaper in curbing illegal use of arms and violence.

#### 7.5 Description of Research Instrument

The instrument used for this study was the code sheet and essay. These were adopted to bring out the real manifest contents in the newspapers. The coding instructions were properly articulated in the content code sheet below to guide the coders in coding the contents of communication while the essay was used to analyze the content of the editorials.

##### 7.5.1 Content Coding Sheet

The study assigned numbers to the content categories to organize the data according to their homogenous subset as they were being collected. The design of the content code sheet of this research is as follows:

1. Portrayal of events (A): A1
2. Policy recommendations (B): B1

#### 7.6 Administration of instrument

The newspapers news stories and editorials that fell within the campaign window frame of 2015 general election in Nigeria were collated by the researcher while they were analyzed through the help of a research assistant.

#### 7.7 Method of Data Analysis

The method of data presentation and analysis were simple descriptive and textual analysis.

##### 7.7.1 Data Presentation

A total of 147 reports on portrayal of illegal use of arms during political campaigns were reported by the three newspapers during the 2015 Nigeria general election. The news genres were coded and analyzed in this research work, drawn from the population of 147 (54 from Tribune, 39 from This Day and 54 from The Punch newspapers) and 15 editorials between November 16, 2014 and March 27, 2015.

##### 7.7.2 Data Analysis Interpretation

Under this section the two research questions were analyzed with the data collected from the newspapers news stories and editorials which focused on portrayal illegal arms use during 2015 general election in Nigeria. They were arranged in tables and analyzed one after the other with a total number of 147 stories and 15 editorials of *Tribune*, *This Day* and *Punch* newspapers between November 16, 2014 and March 27, 2015 analyzed out of the entire study population.

##### 7.7.2.1 Patterns of portrayal of coverage on illegal arms use during the 2015 general election

**Table 1: Patterns of portrayal by Tribune, This Day and Punch newspapers during political campaigns between November 16, 2014 and March 27, 2015**

Page Allotted		Tribune	This Day	Punch	Total
Front	<b>Freq</b>	23	12	21	56
	<b>(%)</b>	15.6	8.2	14.2	38.1
Inside	<b>Freq</b>	12	8	10	30
	<b>(%)</b>	8.2	5.4	6.8	20.4
Back	<b>Freq</b>	19	19	23	61
	<b>(%)</b>	12.9	12.9	15.6	41.6
	<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>147</b>
	<b>(%)</b>	<b>36.7</b>	<b>26.6</b>	<b>36.6</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Independent Survey, 2021

#### 7.8 Discussion of Findings

**Research Question 1: Are there differences in the portrayal of reports on illegal use of arms by Tribune, This Day and Punch newspapers, given their ownerships structure during electioneering in Nigeria?**

From the findings of the study as recorded in **Table 1**, it was observed that there was a significant difference in the reportage on proliferation of arms during the 2015 general election between the three newspapers (*Tribune*, *This Day* and *Punch*). This implies that there is a significant difference as both *Tribune* and *Punch* newspapers took the edge with the percentage of 36.7% each while, *This Day* newspaper had 26.6%. Therefore, the motive of a media organization giving more attention to certain issues in the society to the detriment of others conforms to the theoretical framework of this

study; which are Agenda Setting and Political economy theories.

**Research Question 2: How do the policy recommendations advanced by Tribune, This Day and Punch newspapers help in curbing illegal use of arms and political violence during 2015 general elections?**

*Tribune* in **Figures 1, 2 and 3** below highlighted the need for politicians to direct their energies to peaceful mobilization for the elections instead of the current resort to violence. Also, security agencies should be alive to their responsibilities and ensure that those who engage in violence are brought to book and punished according to the law and that the security and other uniformed services should see the arrest of trucks with illegal arms by the Kwara State Police command as an eye opener and provide for their personnel necessary equipment that will enable them detect unauthorized arms and ammunition.



Figure 1: Editorial, Tribune, 2 December, 2014



Figure 2: Editorial, Tribune, 8 December, 2014



Figure 3: Editorial, Tribune, 4 March, 2015

*This Day* newspaper however in **Figures 4, 5, 6 and 7** stressed the need for community policing; as there is still much to be done by critical stakeholders to end the orgy of bloodshed as the peace accord remained unheeded while INEC must do everything to make available all the essential requirements necessary for conducting credible polls and that all materials must arrive the polling units on time and above all, network with security agencies to ensure voters perform their civic duties in peaceful environment.



Figure 4: Editorial, This Day, February 8, 2015



Figure 5: Editorial, This Day, February 15, 2015



Figure 6: Editorial, This Day, January 24, 2015



Figure 7: Editorial, This Day, February 26, 2015



*Punch* newspaper highlighted in **Figures 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15** the need for security agencies to shun partisanship and discharge their duty to the state by taking counter-measures against any violent threats to the country as security forces must still run gauntlet of skeptics to ensure successful election. Also, parties should refrain from religious, ethnic or tribal sentiments and forcefully condemn provocative statements and acts of violence but engage in issue-based campaigns. Equally party supporters at the grass roots who are merchants of these violent acts should be made to get the message and act in concert. Enforcement of law and order in the country which is critical; youths are reminded that these politicians/elites send their own children to the best schools abroad while arming less privileged youths with stones, cutlasses, swords and guns to wreck violence on others and that NYSC and INEC should come up with a confidence-boosting strategy for youth corps members to be involved in the polls for safety purpose.



Figure 8: Editorial, Punch, January 13, 2015



Figure 9: Editorial, Punch, January 26, 2015



Figure 10: Editorial, Punch, January 20, 2015

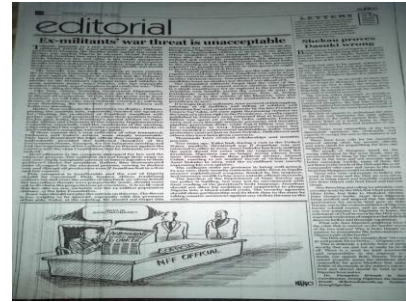


Figure 11: Editorial, Punch, January 29, 2015



Figure 12: Editorial, Punch, January 25, 2015



Figure 13: Editorial, Punch, February 3, 2015



Figure 14: Editorial, Punch, February 11, 2015



Figure 15: Editorial, Punch, March 27, 2015

## 8.0 CONCLUSION

From the findings of this study, it is concluded that the three newspapers had different ways through which they portrayed illegal use of arms during the 2015 general elections in Nigeria. Findings from the study further revealed that the *Tribune and Punch* newspapers gave more attention to the coverage on illegal use of arms during the 2015 general election than the *This Day* newspaper.

## 9.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations are hereby made:

- (1) Media practitioners should constantly bear in mind their professional ethics under the umbrella of media code of conduct. This would help objectivity in portrayal of illegal use of arms.
- (2) As watch-dogs (the Fourth Estate of the realm) of the society mass media practitioners should promote transparent democratic governance by bringing to the public view, those that fan the embers of criminal and terrorist destructive activities.

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