

Politics of Boko Haram Insurgency Reportage During the 2015 Elections in Nigeria

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Abstract: Terrorism is fast assuming various dimensions thereby leaving the media audience confused and increasingly seeking for interpretation of events from a Fourth Estate of the Realm suspected to have deviated from the tenets of objectivity, balance and fair analysis of various sides of the insurgency news in the print media. Using the Frames Analysis Theory of Erving Goffman, the researchers analysed trends in print media coverage of terrorist group Boko Haram's bombings during and after the 2015 elections that saw the ouster of incumbent president Goodluck Jonathan in Nigeria. The Content Analysis of two national newspapers, the Daily Sun and The Punch, for six consecutive months focused mainly on perceived nuances in depictions of the bombings with particular attention to patterns of deployment of the response, powerlessness, political, labeling, conspiracy and ethnicity frames. The study sought to uncover bias that may have beclouded print media reportage of the insurgency and did in fact uncover subtle or often brazen attempts to deviate from objectivity by means of a careful and often deliberate choice of prominence accorded to reports, the tones of reports and especially the use of photographs of bombings. Bias is indeed often hard to grasp and prove and subtlety employed to hide it but the patterns of framing uncovered gave heavy hints of bias and very deliberate framing by journalists.

Key words: Terrorism • Print Media • Boko Haram and Insurgency

INTRODUCTION

Terrorism has existed for at least 2,000 years and is likely to remain a fixture on both national and international agenda in regions of the world for years to come [1]. Terrorism in its very first form started off as a struggle against Roman rule by a radical offshoot of a Jewish sect known as the Zealots during the 1st century AD. The sect fought against Roman colonisation mainly through acts like assassination of Roman officials in full view and in crowded places where there will be many witnesses with a form of dagger known as sica [1].

The next set of terrorists were the Islamic group known as the Assassins that operated between 1090 to 1272 by resisting the Christian Crusaders in the area occupied by modern day Syria and they operated in ways similar to terrorist groups of today by engaging in suicide attacks believing that there is a special reward in the next world for those courageous enough to die defending their

faith [2]. Many other groups have thereafter engaged in terrorism since then and their activities have gone by many names from guerrilla war and insurrection to revolution and civil war [3].

Terrorism is defined as the unlawful use or threat of violence by disgruntled factions or extremists who have an ethnic, social, religious, or political agenda against state actors, or a group of citizens, with intentions to intimidate, frustrate, or coerce a government, individuals or groups, or any sector thereof" [4]. The United States Department of State has adopted the definition found in Title 22 of the United States federal code, which defines terrorism as "premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience [5]. Terrorism is by nature political because it involves the acquisition and use of power for the purpose of forcing others to submit, or agree, to terrorist demands.

Africa has had its own share of terrorist activities, guerrilla warfare, insurgencies and civil wars ranging from crude operations launched to resist colonial rule to genocides and repressive regimes. However, none of these compares to the modern day brand of terrorism being witnessed in some regions and countries in the continent.

In Nigeria, what could be termed terrorism comes in the form of kidnappings and bombings of churches, mosques, oil pipelines, schools and market places by mainly ethnic militia the most prominent of them being the Boko Haram. Its origins are shrouded in controversy as debates rage as to whether they are an offshoot of the Maitatsine movement, have links with the Taliban of Afghanistan and Al Qaeda even as the exact time of the group's emergence remains unknown. Akpan, Ering and Olofu -Adeoye (2013), [6], posited that extant literature suggests that the group was founded by Ustaz Mohammed Yusuf in 2002 in Maiduguri, from where it spread to other parts of northern Nigeria and that its members are mainly from the ranks of the socially oppressed, frustrated, unemployed and unemployable youths of the Northern region as well as the youths from neighboring Chad Republic.

Boko Haram's latest offensive that made headlines worldwide and attracted a lot of attention was the reported abduction of over 200 teenage students at the Federal Government College, Chibok, Bornu State, North-East Nigeria. The activities of the sect have, naturally attracted a lot of media attention globally, especially since after the Chibok abductions.

News frames on terrorism refer to the nuances, bias, opinions and meanings journalists introduce to stories on the subject with a view to breaking down complex reality for readers and viewers. In most modern societies, terrorism is rated a crime and the carnage wrought by terrorists easily eclipse every attempt to hold on to the journalism ethics of fair hearing and objectivity. Whichever side the reporter is on the terrorism divide, it is hard not to introduce bias due to the emotions terror activities evoke.

However, seemingly new trends in framing terrorism have been observed and it appears that the media may have gotten so deeply involved in politics as to utilise framing of terrorism reports to score political points for certain elements and interests in the political class. This study worked to unravel any bias that may have been shown in the way terrorism was framed with a suspected intent to discredit certain classes of politicians and win advantage for others.

The 2015 presidential election in Nigeria was a hot contest between ex-president Goodluck Jonathan and former military head of state General Muhammadu Buhari. The election took place on March 28, 2015.

Statement of the Problem: A lot of scholarly work and empirical studies have been done on the complex relationship between the media and terrorism [7-10]. Also numerous empirical studies and research works exist on news framing of terrorism [11].

However, most of the studies focused on simple framing of terrorism in the media with a view to discouraging more attacks, warn the populace and keep hope alive in the people.

The new trend which this study worked on is one involving the media deliberately blurring lines between journalism and politics and heavily deploying frames meant to possibly unseat a government as was suspected to be the case in Nigeria during the 2015 elections.

Objectives of the Study: The main objective is to uncover patterns of bias, if any, in the coverage of the Boko Haram insurgency before and directly after the 2015 elections in Nigeria.

The specific objectives are:

- To examine the prominence accorded to Boko Haram insurgency stories before and after the elections and the possible implications.
- To examine the tones used in reporting the Boko Haram insurgency before and after the elections and the possible implications.
- To examine the frames deployed in reporting the Boko Haram insurgency before and after the elections and the possible implications.

Theoretical Framework: The theoretical underpinning for this research is the frame analysis theory. Baran and Davis (2006:285), [12], posited that the Frame analysis theory as developed by Erving Goffman is a "microscopic theory that focuses on how individuals learn to routinely make sense of their social world. But this theory can be combined with macroscopic concerns to create a conceptual framework that considers (1) the social and political context in which framing takes place and (2) the long term social and political consequences of the frames learned from the media". Erving Goffman elaborated on this theory in 1974 in his book, *Framing analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*.

Framing is basically used to explain how the mass media promote a particular definition of an issue through selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration [13]. McQuail (2010), [14], pointed out that a large number of textual devices can be used to perform these activities and they include using certain words or phrases, making certain contextual references, choosing certain pictures or film, giving examples as typical and referring to certain sources.

The most common use of frames is in terms of the frame the news or media place on the information they convey. They are thought to influence the perception of the news by the audience, in this way it could be construed as a form of second level agenda-setting—they not only tell the audience what to think about (agenda-setting theory), but also how to think about that issue (second level agenda setting).

Framing is one of the media effects theories, largely used to analyze how the mass-media filter information and thus, influence the public's reactions to a whole range of external stimuli. Auerbach and Bloch-Elkon (2005), [15], have found correlations between low levels of political information, on one hand and the predisposition to adopt frames, on the other hand. Interestingly, Shah *et al.*, (2004), [16], has shown that, in general, the public is more affected by negative frames than by the positive ones.

McQuail (2010), [13], described the United States media reporting of two similar air tragedies in which military action caused the deaths of large numbers of civilians. One was the Korean aircraft (KAL 007) shot down in 1983 by a Soviet plane; the other was an Iranian civil flight (Iran Air 655) shot down in 1988 by a US naval vessel in the Persian Gulf. The events were reported quite differently in ways that reflected both ethnocentrism and the international tensions of the times. KAL tragedy was reported as deliberate and as an attack while Iran Air disaster was made to look like a mistake and a tragic event.

Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) and Iyengar (1991), [17, 18], came up with types of frame used in media coverage of various phenomena. These frames include response frame, ethnic frame, political frame, economic frame, religious frame, powerlessness frame, attribution of responsibility frame, labeling frame, human interest frame and conspiracy frame.

Methodology: This study adopted the content analysis approach. The unit of analysis in this study is a news story, feature and editorial, letter to the editor, cartoon, photograph or opinion on Boko Haram activities.

They were analysed to find out prominence, depth, tone and dominant frames adopted in the reportage. The units were analysed based on ten types of frames made up of the response frame, ethnic frame, political frame, economic frame and religious frame, powerlessness frame, attribution of responsibility frame, labeling frame and conspiracy frame were These measures were developed by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) and Iyengar (1991), [17, 18], for analyzing frames in media coverage of various phenomenon.

For tones adopted, the researchers classified the possibilities into positive, negative and neutral tones.

The sample size was made up of 60 issues each of *The Punch* and the *Daily Sun* which came to a grand total of 120 issues. This was arrived at by purposively selecting ten issues each of the two papers per month for six month (January to June, 2015).

The two newspapers were selected based on the fact that both are national newspapers with wide readership and circulation and as good subjects to test the tendency to frame stories along partisan lines since they both belong to political party stalwarts. *The Nation* belongs to a chieftain of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Chief Ahmed Bola Tinubu, while the *Daily Sun* belongs to a former governor of Abia State and the Peoples Progressive Alliance (PPA) flag bearer for a senatorial seat in Abia State, South-East, Nigeria in the last election, Chief Orji Uzor Kalu. He was formerly a member of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) which had the then incumbent president Goodluck Jonathan as the presidential candidate.

The coding sheet was used to collect information.

Data Presentation and Analyses: The main aim of the study was to find out how Boko Haram activities were framed from January to March, being the last three months before the election and then study the pattern of framing for the next three months (April to June) immediately after the elections. A comparison of framing patterns before and after the elections will then reveal whether there were deliberate efforts to introduce bias along partisan lines.

The content analysis yielded a total of 381 items, 186 of them from the *Daily Sun* and 195 from *The Punch*. Out of the 186 stories in the *Daily Sun*, 135 (72.6%) were news stories while 120 out of the 195 stories in *The Punch* were news stories.

Table 1 below shows details of the story types on the Boko Haram insurgency in the two newspapers for the six months studied. It can be seen from the table that the frequency of Boko Haram stories dropped immediately

Table 1: showing story types on the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria

DAILY SUN								
Month	News	Features	Opinions	Letters to Editor	Photos	Cartoons	Editorial	Total
January	25(65.8)	4(10.5)	3(7.9)	0(0)	4(10.5)	0(0)	2(5.3)	38(100)
February	33(76.7)	1(2.3)	2(4.7)	0(0)	5(11.7)	1(2.3)	1(2.3)	43(100)
March	24(75)	2(6.3)	4(12.5)	0(0)	0(0)	1(3.1)	1(3.1)	32(100)
April	15(62.5)	4(16.7)	1(4.1)	0(0)	4(16.7)	0(0)	0(0)	24(100)
May	18(78.3)	1(4.4)	3(13)	1(4.3)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	23(100)
June	20(76.9)	2(7.7)	3(11.5)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	1(3.9)	26(100)
Total	135	14	16	1	13	2	5	186
THE PUNCH								
January	24(52.2)	0(0)	12(26.1)	3(6.5)	5(10.8)	1(2.2)	1(2.2)	46(100)
February	16(44.4)	0(0)	4(11.1)	2(5.6)	13(36.1)	0(0)	1(2.8)	36(100)
March	23(74.2)	0(0)	5(16.1)	0(0)	2(6.5)	1(3.2)	0(0)	31(100)
April	17(65.4)	1(3.9)	3(11.5)	0(0)	4(15.3)	0(0)	1(3.9)	26(100)
May	16(59.3)	0(0)	1(3.7)	0(0)	9(33.3)	0(0)	1(3.7)	27(100)
June	24(82.8)	0(0)	2(6.9)	0(0)	2(6.9)	0(0)	1(3.4)	29(100)
Total	120	1	27	5	35	2	5	195

after the elections in both newspapers. The *Daily Sun* had a total of 113 or 60.8% of the 186 Boko Haram stories before the elections while *The Punch* had 113 (57.9%) out of its total story count of 195 in the three months before the elections.

It can also be seen from Table 1 that the *Daily Sun* published four editorials on the insurgency before the elections and only one after. The *Punch* on its own part had two editorials before the elections and three after. The *Daily Sun* had nine photographs on the insurgency before the elections and four after. The *Punch* published 20 photographs before the elections and 15 after the elections. All cartoons on Boko Haram were published by both newspapers before the elections as can be seen on Table 1.

The study also sought to uncover the rate and level of prominence accorded Boko Haram stories across the six months. In ranking, page one lead stories are usually considered the most important stories of the day with the page one second lead story next in importance. Other important stories of the day are promoted on the front page and published in the inside pages while routine, not-so-important stories are moved to the inside pages.

Weighing almost as much as the front page is the back page and important stories are also scheduled for the back pages. Displaying a story on either the front or the back page gives it maximum prominence and is a form of promoting salience and setting agenda.

In the period under study, 39.5% of the stories on Boko Haram published by the *Daily Sun* appeared on either the front or back pages in January; 39.6% of stories were on the two prime pages in February while in March, the figure dropped to 9.3%.

The Punch newspapers published 43.5% of Boko Haram stories on either the back or front pages in January, 69.4% in February and 48.4% in March.

Full details of prominence accorded Boko Haram stories in both the months before the elections and after are shown in Table 2 below.

Another aim of the study was to find out the depth of space allotted to Boko Haram stories by the two newspapers. It is usually assumed that important stories are allotted more column inches that the ones considered routine and not-so-important by newspapers.

A full page or more can therefore be allotted to a story considered very important while other items get half a page, a quarter page or a few column inches. In the study, the rankings include a full page or more as weighing the most; half a page or more but less than a page came second, a quarter page or more but less than half was given third place while anything less than a quarter page came last.

A full page to a quarter page are all classified as signifying importance and Table 3 below gives details of depth allotted to the stories for the six months under review. From Table 2 below, it can be seen that there were

Table 2: showing prominence of Boko Haram stories by the Daily Sun and The Punch

DAILY SUN						
Month	P.1 lead	P.1 2 nd Lead	P.1 Promo	Back page	Inside page	Total
January	5(13.1)	8(21.1)	0(0)	2(5.3)	23(60.5)	38(100)
February	7(16.3)	8(18.6)	2(4.7)	0(0)	26(60.4)	43(100)
March	0(0)	1(3.1)	1(3.1)	1(3.1)	29(90.7)	32(100)
April	2(8.3)	5(20.9)	2(8.3)	0(0)	15(62.5)	24(100)
May	4(17.4)	0(0)	4(17.4)	2(8.7)	13(56.5)	23(100)
June	1(3.9)	1(3.9)	4(15.3)	1(3.9)	19(73)	26(100)
Total	19	23	13	6	125	186
THE PUNCH						
January	1(2.2)	5(10.9)	11(23.9)	3(6.5)	26(56.5)	46(100)
February	5(13.9)	13(36.1)	7(19.4)	0(0)	11(30.6)	36(100)
March	1(3.2)	5(16.1)	9(29.1)	0(0)	16(51.6)	31(100)
April	1(3.9)	7(26.9)	5(19.2)	0(0)	13(50)	26(100)
May	0(0)	11(40.7)	4(14.9)	1(3.7)	11(40.7)	27(100)
June	1(3.5)	1(3.5)	9(31)	0(0)	18(62)	29(100)
Total	9	42	45	4	95	195

Table 3: Showing depth of stories on Boko Haram in the two newspapers

DAILY SUN					
Month	Full page	Half page	Quarter page	Less than quarter page	Total
January	6(15.8)	4(10.5)	5(13.2)	23(60.5)	38(100)
February	2(4.6)	5(11.6)	18(41.9)	18(41.9)	43(100)
March	4(12.5)	5(15.6)	5(15.6)	18(56.3)	32(100)
April	4(16.7)	2(8.3)	3(12.5)	15(62.5)	24(100)
May	4(17.4)	2(8.7)	6(26.1)	11(47.8)	23(100)
June	0(0)	6(23)	8(30.8)	12(46.2)	26(100)
Total	20	24	24	97	186
THE PUNCH					
January	0(0)	9(19.6)	12(26.1)	25(54.3)	46(100)
February	3(8.3)	3(8.3)	9(25)	21(58.4)	36(100)
March	1(3.2)	4(12.9)	3(9.7)	23(74.2)	31(100)
April	2(7.7)	6(23.1)	0(0)	18(69.2)	26(100)
May	0(0)	2(7.4)	7(25.9)	18(66.7)	27(100)
June	0(0)	3(10.3)	14(48.3)	12(41.4)	29(100)
Total	6	27	45	117	195

12 full pages, 14 half pages and 28 quarter pages from January to March in the Daily Sun and that there was a drop to 8 full pages, 10 half pages and 17 quarter pages after the elections. The same pattern is also observable in The Punch on Table 2.

The next aspect of Boko Haram reportage pattern study was the tone of reports by the two newspapers for the six months. Stories that merely were neutral in terms of the ways the government in power handled the attacks were ranked as ‘neutral,’ while others were ranked as ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ depending on how the government of Goodluck Jonathan was framed.

Table 4 below shows an appreciable level of negative portrayals in the three months before the elections in both newspapers and in the case of *The Punch*, it persisted well after the March 28 presidential elections in Nigeria while it dropped in the *Daily Sun* after the elections.

Table 4: showing tones used in reporting Boko Haram by the two newspapers

DAILY SUN				
Month	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Total
January	4(10.5)	22(57.9)	12(31.6)	38(100)
February	18(41.9)	15(34.9)	10(23.2)	43(100)
March	10(31.2)	14(43.8)	8(25)	32(100)
April	11(45.8)	10(41.7)	3(12.5)	24(100)
May	9(39.2)	7(30.4)	7(30.4)	23(100)
June	4(15.4)	10(38.5)	12(46.1)	26(100)
Total	56	78	52	186
THE PUNCH				
January	10(21.2)	30(65.2)	6(13.1)	46(100)
February	13(36.1)	17(47.2)	6(16.7)	36(100)
March	10(32.3)	19(61.3)	2(6.4)	31(100)
April	7(26.9)	16(61.5)	3(11.6)	26(100)
May	15(55.6)	4(14.8)	8(29.6)	27(100)
June	7(24.1)	16(55.2)	6(20.7)	29(100)
Total	62	102	31	195

Table 5: showing frames usage in Boko Haram coverage by the two newspapers

DAILY SUN											
Month	Pow	Res	Ethn	Lab	Cons	Pol	Attr	H.Int	Econ	Rel	Total
January	10(26.3)	11(28.9)	0(0)	0(0)	2(5.3)	12(31.6)	0(0)	3(7.9)	0(0)	0(0)	38(100)
February	11(25.6)	17(39.5)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	14(32.6)	0(0)	1(2.3)	0(0)	0(0)	43(100)
March	7(21.9)	11(34.4)	1(3.1)	0(0)	2(6.3)	9(28.1)	0(0)	1(3.1)	0(0)	1(3.1)	32(100)
April	9(37.5)	6(25)	1(4.2)	0(0)	0(0)	6(25)	0(0)	2(8.3)	0(0)	0(0)	24(100)
May	2(8.7)	12(52.2)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	3(13)	0(0)	6(26.1)	0(0)	0(0)	23(100)
June	5(19.2)	6(23.1)	0(0)	0(0)	4(15.4)	11(42.3)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	26(100)
Total	44	63	2	0	8	55	0	13	0	1	186
THE PUNCH											
January	19(41.3)	14(30.4)	0(0)	0(0)	2(4.3)	8(17.5)	2(4.3)	1(2.2)	0(0)	0(0)	46(100)
February	15(41.7)	14(38.9)	0(0)	0(0)	1(2.8)	6(16.6)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	36(100)
March	12(38.7)	11(35.5)	0(0)	0(0)	4(12.9)	3(9.7)	0(0)	1(3.2)	0(0)	0(0)	31(100)
April	12(46.3)	9(34.6)	0(0)	0(0)	2(7.7)	1(3.8)	1(3.8)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	26(100)
May	3(11.1)	20(74.1)	0(0)	1(3.7)	0(0)	1(3.7)	0(0)	2(7.4)	0(0)	1(3.7)	27(100)
June	12(41.4)	10(34.5)	0(0)	0(0)	2(6.9)	5(17.2)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	29(100)
Total	73	78	0	1	11	24	3	4	0	1	195

Frames deployed in the reports were also studies and there was a preponderance of the Powerlessness, Policy response and Political frames out of the ten frames under which the stories were examined. It can also be observed that there was more framing along the political and powerlessness lines before the elections than after in both newspapers.

The Powerlessness frame was mainly used as a means of portraying ex-president Goodluck Jonathan as inept, incompetent and incapable of handling the insurgency.

Details of how the frames were used in the six months are shown on Table 5 below.

DISCUSSION

From the analyses of data and in the process of coding, it could easily be seen that the journalistic tenet of objectivity was not always adhered to in the reportage of the insurgency. There was a lot of name-calling, blaming and destructive portrayals of both the military and the president as inept.

The powerlessness frame was heavily deployed prior to the elections while a lot of page one lead stories and photographs gave the impression of growing incompetence by the military and the commander-in-chief of the armed forces who is of course the president.

It was also observed that after the elections lost by president Jonathan, stories of attacks with heavy fatalities with accompanying photographs were often hidden in the inside pages in a way that gave the impression that

there was no will anymore to embarrass him with the carnage photos that featured prominently during his campaigns.

One other observation was that after the elections and loss by Jonathan, stories referring to the insurgency, when not still lampooning him, were mainly aimed at suggesting an action plan on the matter for the incoming president, Muhammadu Buhari.

It may be coincidence, but after the elections, headlines changed to such positive ones as “Shekau disappears” (*Daily Sun*, April 24, 2015), “Military frees 200 girls in Sambisa” (*Daily Sun*, April 29, 2015), “Boko Haram: Military kills scores of insurgents, crushes terror camps” (*Daily Sun*, May 9, 2015) and photographs were of Nigerian refugees in Chad returning home while a lot of prominence was given to utterances of the winner of the elections as he proposed action plans for fighting terrorism after his swearing in.

In the case of *The Punch*, negative stories were increasingly being tucked in the inside pages. A story, “Suicide bomber kills 50 after shouting sai Buhari” was hidden in page two and not even promoted on page on June 3, 2015; “B’Haram kill 37 in Borno” was also hidden in page 8 on June 12, 2015 while a big photograph of a policeman at the site of a suicide attack at the cattle market in Maiduguri was on page 25 on June 3, 2015. Such stories and photographs made front page before the elections.

A comparison of prominence, tone, space and frames as well as the frequency of frame-susceptible items like cartoons, editorials, opinions and photographs before and after the elections seems to betray bias in reportage.

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