Analysis of the Coverage of the Ekiti 2018 Governorship Elections in Two Nigerian Newspapers

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the nature of contents of newspaper coverage and reports of the 2018 gubernatorial elections in Ekiti State to unravel what transpired before, during and after the elections. The study was anchored on the gate-keeping and framing theories. As a quantitative research, this study adopted the content analysis research design. The population of the study comprised all editions of June through August of *The Punch* and *The Guardian* newspapers in 2018, which summed up to 184 editions. The study employed the census sampling technique and the instrument that was used to gather data was the code sheet. It was found that activities regarding the Ekiti 2018 gubernatorial elections were majorly reported in news format and that despite the 303 stories on the studied election published by both *The Guardian* and *The Punch* newspapers, only few illustrations (in form of pictures) were used to back up the stories. Findings further indicate that little prominence was given to the 2018 Ekiti gubernatorial elections by the newspapers. It concluded, based on the major findings, that the Ekiti 2018 gubernatorial elections were majorly reported in news format – implying that the election activities were only reported as they occurred with no in-depth analyses by both *The Guardian* and *The Punch* newspapers. Consequently, it recommended that electioneering activities should not only be reported in news formats but in other forms such as opinions, features, columns and editorials as this provide much knowledge to readers.

Key Words: ***Newspaper, Coverage, Elections, Governorship Election***

INTRODUCTION/ PROBLEM STATEMENT

A considerable number of people across the globe rely on the media of mass communication for information on the general electoral/political process. When a people are well-informed, the possibility of successful electoral/political activities is high and vice versa. Lack of appropriate awareness on the electoral process could mar the successes of the process and has been found to be the case in developing societies such as Nigeria. For instance, Udende (2011) who researched on the mass media, political awareness and voting behaviour in the Nigeria's 2011 Presidential Election found that the level of political awareness among the electorate in Nigeria seems very low; majority of voters lack basic knowledge about the entire political process to take reasoned decisions on election matters, and they follow their traditional voting pattern as they vote on the basis of religion and ethnic ties rather than on issues that are critical to human existence.

Consequently, there is need for all stakeholders such as the election umpire (INEC), political parties, civil society organisations, individuals, the mass media, etc. to ensure that appropriate political education/awareness is provided to the people for positive action in this regard. This obviously depends on the nature of coverage and reportage of political messages to the citizenry, particularly by the mass media – due to their wide reach. It could be implied that the nature of coverage and reportage of the political process (campaigns, elections, governance) is influenced by the government and political actors, in general. It can also be implied that the nature of media's coverage of electioneering campaigns and elections has overtime raised varying opinions among the populace.

The 2018 gubernatorial elections in Ekiti State no exemption as the media were awash with contentious reports of the process of the – before, during and after the elections. A notable instance of this scenario is that which *The Guardian* (2018) reported a case of a policeman accidentally shooting an Ekiti

APC chieftain and five others at the party's gubernatorial rally but which the APC alleged it was an assassination attempt. However, other media including Daily Trust aptly captured the incidence as the police deliberately distorting the event with the aim of frustrating it. It is therefore, in efforts to unravel the nature of contents of such coverage and reports that this research carry out an analysis of newspaper coverage of the Ekiti gubernatorial election in 2018.

Research Questions

i. What were the forms of coverage of the 2018 Ekiti Governorship Election by *The Punch* and *The Guardian* newspapers?
ii. To what extent was prominence was given to the 2018 Ekiti governorship election in *The Punch* and *The Guardian* newspapers?
iii. What were the direction of coverage by *The Punch* and *The Guardian* newspapers of the 2018 Ekiti governorship election?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Media Framing Theory: The framing theory was propounded by Erving Goffman in 1974 in his book, Framing analysis: An essay on the organization of experience. Framing is used here to explain how the mass media promote a particular definition of an issue through selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration (Scheufele & Iyengar, 2010). The basic premise undergirding the framing theory is the idea that discourse whether by political actors or the media is constructed through selection, emphasis, labelling, and categorization through which information is presented to audiences. In the1970s, Gregory Bateson offered one of the earliest and most useful conceptualizations of framing when he postulated that communication occurs within "frames," which perform several functions including providing context, signals, and identification, which help in the communication process.

Bateson believed that frames provide a means through which language achieves an awareness of certain issues, and transmits cues and messages through what is implied, included or excluded. In this sense the concept of framing is valid for any form of discourse or text as well as media artefacts (Bateson, 1972). He writes that frames work because "by including certain messages within a frame, certain other messages are excluded...and by excluding certain messages certain others are included" (p.187). This basic perspective of framing has roots in other fields such as anthropology but has been extended to the field of media and communication studies. In his study of patients with schizophrenia, Bateson postulated that such patients had difficulty with "framing" in the sense that they cannot tell where a picture frame ends and a wallpaper begins (Bateson, 1972). In general much of the scholarship on framing is diverse with some perceiving it as a way to make sense of and understand a complex world, issue or personality (Goffman, 1974), a "central organizing idea" used to comprehend messages (Gamson& Modigliani, 1989, p.2), a way to "organize everyday reality" (Tuchman, 1978, p.193), a "social narrative" (Durham, 1998, p. 102), or as a means to "group, categories and thematize texts in order to get to the heart of issues being discussed and to make for easier understanding" (Reese, 2001, p. 7). Framing is an appropriate approach for analyzing speeches, books and media reports because in Goffman's view, the concept is fundamentally about how experience or reality is organized and presented (Goffman, 2014).

The theory of framing is important to this study because it offers critical ways to (a) examine messages, (b) observe patterns and identify themes, (c) investigate how frames are constructed, (d) and analyze the underlying meanings of these frames (D'Angelo, 2002; Scheufele, 1999; Scheufele& Tewksbury, 2007).

Perceptions on Media Coverage of Elections

It is globally held that the mass media of communication have considerable roles in elections and the electoral process, in general. Despite controversies of the media's roles, in this regard, the relationship between the media and elections is obvious. Temin and Smith (2002, p. 585) for instance asserts that:

> The role of the media, both state-owned and private, is an important and often overlooked component of any election, particularly those occurring in developing countries. Unfortunately, the existing academic literature on the subject is thin, especially concerning the recent flurry of democratic elections in Africa.

Frère (2011) studied elections held in six countries of Central Africa – Burundi (2005), the Central African Republic (2005), the Democratic Republic of Congo (2006), Congo Brazzaville (2002, 2007), Chad (1996, 2001, 2006) and Rwanda (2003) after experiencing post-conflict situations. The study attempted to show the many challenges faced by the media while covering the post-conflict elections in Central Africa. Frère (2011) noted that the media operated in an insecure and economically challenging environment. Journalists were attacked and some were even murdered in line of duty. There was also the lack infrastructure, inadequate equipment and untrained staff. According to Frère (2007) conflicts increases pressure on independent media, leading most of them to serve influential politicians in order to be secured or simply survive. Frère (2011) found that although the Electoral Laws in these six countries decreed that the media should ensure equal and fair coverage during elections, the media conspicuously demonstrated favouritism towards the incumbent president. Frère (2011) asserted that imbalance, either quantitative or qualitative characterized the media monitoring reportage during the post-conflict elections. The current study sought to establish bias in the way the *Daily Graphic* reported the election petition.

Temin and Smith (2002) examined the crucial role of the media in Ghana's 2000 campaign and elections in which the John Agyekum Kufuor's New Patriotic Party (NPP) defeated Jerry John Rawlings" National Democratic Congress (NDC). Temin & Smith (2002) noted that while the media endeavoured significant efforts to ensure fair coverage to the various political parties, the ruling NDC received the bulk of attention. The study found that the coverage of political party activity by the state-owned print media (*Daily Graphic* and *The Ghanaian Times*) favoured the ruling NDC in terms of quantity and length of stories. The current study used quantity and length of story as a variable to measure the level of prominence with which the *Daily Graphic* covered the election petition. Temin and Smith (2002) indicated that overall, 45 percent of all political stories carried by the state-owned newspapers focused on the NDC. According to Temin and Smith (2002) the tone of the state-owned newspaper's reportage was quite balanced, with both the incumbent and opposition parties receiving largely positive or neutral coverage, with relatively few negative stories appearing in the state-owned press.

Amoakohene (2007) did content and document analyses of two newspapers (the state-owned *Daily Graphic* and the privately owned *Ghanaian Chronicle*) in Ghana. The purpose of the study was to compare these newspapers "coverage of two different constitutional governments (President Kufuor's NPP and President Rawlings" NDC). Amoakohene (2007) focused on the relationship between the mass media and government during the 1993-1994 and 2001-2002 parts of the NDC and NPP regimes respectively. Using measurement indicators such as size, direction and tone of political stories, Amoakohene (2007) found a systematic bias in the reportage of the two newspapers. The *Daily Graphic* favoured the ruling administrations while the *Ghanaian Chronicle* was against the NDC in particular. Amoakohene (2007) concluded that the level of prominence given to political stories is mainly as a result of relations between political systems and the media. Khudiyev (2005) also studied 2003 post-election protests in Azerbaijan to determine bias in the press coverage of

the protests. The study used a content analysis of three highly circulated local newspapers, one state owned and the others privately owned, during a three-week period following the election day when the main subject of local newspapers‟ coverage was protest actions in the streets of the capital city, Baku. The study found that significant differences exist in newspaper coverage reflecting differences in ownership. The study showed how ownership of media outlets affects political coverage of the street protests by opposition party supporters through unbalanced coverage and framing. It was found that the state-owned media had a favourable tone towards the government police and actions of the police forces during the mass disorders. The current study sought to find out the dominant tone (positive, neutral or negative) with which the *Daily Graphic* reported the election petition. Closely linked to the study of Khudiyev (2005) is a study by Lynett (2011). Lynette (2011) studied how some U.S. and British newspapers reported the Kenyan post-election crisis of 2007 and 2008. A qualitative content analysis of publications of the *New York Times*, the *Associated Press*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and *Reuters*, a U.K. news service between December, 2007 and March, 2008 was done. The findings showed that reporters characterized the crisis more often as stemming from a complex sociopolitical circumstance that was further agitated by allegations of fraud in the presidential election. The study also found that most of the articles were reported using the narrative journalism style which framed the stories as sympathetic and humanizing.

A study by Goretti (2007) content analyzed two newspapers on conflicts in Northern Uganda, namely *The New Vision* which is government owned and *The Monitor* which a private newspaper. Three years (1998, 2000 & 2003) was sampled for the study consisting of the first six months of the three years and was further progressively narrowed down to a week of each month. The study, among others, sought to examine the prominence and tone of the coverage of conflicts in terms of bias, confrontational or conciliatory. It was found out that the government newspaper was largely biased towards government and confrontational in its reports, while the private newspaper used a more conciliatory tone and was more balanced (not biased) on its coverage of the conflict using various sources for its stories. As regards placement, the stories were given relatively high prominence since quite a number of them dominated the front page (Goretti, 2007). In measuring the level of prominence and tone with which nursing homes were covered from 1999 to 2008 in the United States, Miller et al (2012) also content analyzed 1,704 articles from four leading national newspapers – the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Chicago Tribune* and *Los Angeles Times*. It was found that most of the articles were news stories and about one-quarter were on the front page of the newspapers. Also most articles were negative or neutral in tone, and very few were positive (Miller et al, 2012). Similarly, the current study sought to measure the level of prominence and dominant tone of the election petition coverage by the *Daily Graphic*. Andrade (2013) also measured prominence and tone of coverage with which Julian Assange, the founder of WikiLeaks was framed after the Ecuadorian government granted him political asylum at its embassy in London. The study content analyzed 380 articles in English and Spanish newspapers from various continents (North America, Europe, Australia /New Zealand, Asia, and Latin America). The study specifically sought to examine the tone and how prominent the newspapers covered Assange. Andrade (2013) found out that the tone was generally neutral/positive towards Assange and the European newspapers gave more prominence to Assange than newspapers from North America and other continents because only newspapers from Europe mentioned Assange on their front pages. Also, Freyenberger (2013) examined how Amanda Knox was framed in newspaper articles around the world during the four years she was imprisoned in Italy. Knox is an American woman who was accused of the 2007 murder of Meredith Kercher, one of the women who shared her apartment. Knox was freed in 2011. The purpose of the study was to determine tone of coverage as well as prominence by story placement. The results showed that mentions of Amanda Knox were more negative in the United Kingdom and Ireland. Story placement was more prominent in newspapers of Australia, New Zealand, South Korea and China (Freyenberger, 2013). The current study sought to measure prominence by story placement but considered

other variables like type of story, size of story, size of headline and type of enhancement.

In measuring tone of coverage, Busher (2006) content analyzed 194 articles from the *New York Times* to determine how Hillary Clinton was framed after her decision to run for the 2000 New York senate elections. The study, essentially among others, sought to measure the tone with which coverage was made. The study showed that majority of the articles were covered with neutral tones. The study omitted content such as editorials, columns, and political cartoons because it intended to examine the information an individual would find when searching for political information about a candidate (Busher, 2006). Brunken also sought to find out the tone with which the government responded to Hurricane Katrina (a natural disaster caused by a massive storm) immediately after its occurrence in 2005 at New Orleans. A total of 531 stories were content analyzed from four newspapers (two elitist and two local) in the United States. The elite newspapers used were the *Washington Post* and *The New York Times* because they are said to set the agenda for the nation. The local newspapers were *The Advocate* and the *Times Picayune* because of the proximity to the disaster. It was found that the tone in general was relatively neutral. The tone of the elitist newspapers were more positive than that of the local newspapers on the government's response to the crisis ((Brunken, 2006).

Cummings (2006) did a content analysis of how two leading newspapers framed the 2004 presidential elections in the United States. A total of 173 news articles were analyzed, out of which there were 105 news stories, 50 columns, and 18 editorials. The study sought to identify bias in the coverage of the two presidential candidates (George Bush and John Kerry) during the final two weeks prior to the elections. The study which focused on *The Washington Times* and *The New York Times* found that most of the articles published on the front-page of *The Washington Times* were in favour of Bush while a quarter of them supported Kerry and few were neutral. The *New York Times* on the other hand also had half of its front-page stories in favor of Kerry while less than half favoured Bush with few being neutral. "Both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Times* were found to be guilty, according to the study data, of favoring one presidential candidate over the other during the critical final two weeks of the Election of 2004" (Cummings 2006, p. 35). Davis (2004) examined how the mass media framed the South African general elections in 2004. It was found out that newspaper coverage of the election was generally neutral and the incumbent party in power, African National Congress (ANC), dominated the coverage followed by the main opposition party, Democratic Alliance (DA). However, the DA got more coverage than other opposition parties. Davis (2004) argues that these two parties were most active on the campaign and had high profile leaders that attracted the media to cover their election events. Using content analysis, Grbeša (2012) examined how the major newspapers in Croatia used certain frames (success, suitability and integrity) to report about the two front-running candidates (Milan Bandić and Ivo Josipović) in the second round of that country's 2010 presidential elections. The paper primarily examined if there were any differences between Ivo Josipović and Milan Bandić in terms of their visibility in the newspaper reports. The time frame for the study was during the official campaign of the second-round presidential election (December 28, 2009 to January 8, 2010). The study sampled 202 articles from four leading newspapers in Croatia: *Jutarnji list*, *Večernji list*, *SlobodnaDalmacija*and*Novi list*. The study found that while Ivo Josipović was framed as suitable for the position, honest and decent, and as likely winner, Milan Bandić on the other hand was framed predominantly as dishonest, unsuitable and a loser. Grbeša (2012) asserts that the 2010 presidential election in Croatia was essentially framed as a battle between a good guy and a bad guy. Also, the study found that Milan Bandić was more prominent in coverage than Ivo Josipović since it appeared that he was the central concern of most articles than his opponent Ivo Josipović. Grbeša (2012) suggests that newspaper framing of the candidates during the 2010 Croatian election may have contributed to the victory of Ivo Josipović. It is therefore quite obvious that the newspaper coverage of 2012 second-round presidential election was biased in favor of Ivo Josipović.

Khan (2003) did a quantitative content analysis of photos and the captions carried on the websites of *The New York Times, Times,* and *The Economist* to understand the visual framing of Iran's 2009 controversial presidential election. Khan collected 102 photos from the three newspaper websites and put

them into different framing categories. The study found that the three newspaper websites gave considerably more visual coverage to the runner-up candidate, Mousavi, than the incumbent reelected president, Ahmadinedjad. This implies that Mousavi gained more prominence in the overall coverage than Ahmadinedjad. Khan (2003) emphasized that apart from Mousavi, the three newspaper websites almost unnoticed the other two Iranian presidential candidates, who had also contested the election, lost it, and protested against the results. Khan (2003) maintains that, the overall visual coverage gave the impression as if there was only one opposition leader (Mousavi) in Iran and a two-party political system. The study also found that quite a significant amount of the total coverage was unfavorable towards Ahmadinedjad. It can therefore be said that the coverage of the 2009 presidential election in Iran was somewhat biased in favour of Mousavi (Khan, 2003).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The population of this study comprise all editions of June, July and August of *The Punch* and *The Guardian* newspapers, which all covered and reported 2018 Ekiti State Gubernatorial Elections. These newspapers are daily newspapers and since the timeframe of coverage for this study was the period of June through August, and because June has 30 days while July and August are 31 days respectively, the total number of publications was therefore 184 editions. The number of 184 editions, as the population of study, is considered the sample of study based on census sampling technique. Code Sheet was used as data collection instrument.

The unit of analysis was based on forms, prominence and direction of reports on newspaper framing of the 2018 gubernatorial election in Ekiti State. Consequently, forms of reports are determined by features, news, columns, editorials, opinions, letter-to-editor and interviews as published by *The Punch and The Guardian* newspapers while prominence is based on how the newspapers made placement and length of reports on the studied election. Placement is whether the reports were published on front page, inside page or back page while the length of the stories is measured by one to three inches, four to seven inches, eight to eleven inches and 12 inches and above. The direction of reports was established based on whether the reports were positive, negative or neural. Positive reports evoke favourable sentiments, negative ones stirs up pessimistic feelings while neutral reports stirs up an indifferent emotional reaction.

DATA PRESENTATION

Table 1: Formats of reportage of the studied Gubernatorial Elections

Options	***The Guardian***	***The Punch***	**Total**	**Percentage (%)**
Features	8	27	35	11.5
News	148	103	251	83
Columns	0	0	0	0
Editorial	1	2	3	1
Opinions	4	2	6	2
Letter-to-the editor	0	0	0	0
Interviews	6	2	8	2.5
Total	**167**	**136**	**303**	**100**

Table 1 above signifies that activities regarding the Ekiti 2018 Gubernatorial elections were only reported as they occurred with no in-depth analyses by both *The Guardian* and *The Punch* newspapers. As indicated in the table a significant majority of 251 representing (83%) of the stories were reported in news formats. Editorials, regarded as the voice of newspapers, were just three (3) representing (1%).

Table 2: Placement of Stories on the Ekiti 2018 Gubernatorial Elections by the Newspapers

Options	***The Guardian***	***The Punch***	**Total**	**Percentage (%)**

Front page lead	17	4	21	7
Inside Page	150	132	282	93
Back Page	0	0	0	0
Total	**167**	**136**	**303**	**100**

Table 2 shows the placement of Stories on the Ekiti 2018 gubernatorial elections by *The Guardian* and *The Punch* newspapers. The data indicate that out of 303 stories that were covered, only 21 (7%) stories were presented on the front page lead whereas none of the stories were reported on the back page. This signifies that despite the considerable reportage of the elections, little prominence was given to the 2018 Ekiti gubernatorial elections by the newspapers.

Table 3: Length of Stories reported by *The Guardian* and *Punch* newspapers

Options	*The Guardian*	*The Punch*	Total	Percentage (%)
1 – 3 inches	12	8	20	7
4 – 7 inches	44	26	70	23
8 – 11 inches	54	34	88	29
12 inches and above	57	68	125	41
Total	**167**	**136**	**303**	**100**

The table 3 above illustrates that majority (125) of the stories that were reported on the election by *the Guardian* and *The Punch* newspapers were lengthy (12inches and above). This implies that some considerable amount of time was devoted to news stories on the 2018 Ekiti Gubernatorial election.

Table 4: Directionality of studied stories

Options	*The Guardian*	*The Punch*	Total	Percentage (%)
Negative	67	45	113	37
Positive	48	48	96	32
Neutral	52	43	95	31
Total	**167**	**136**	**303**	**100**

Table 4 reveals the directionality of reportage of the 2018 Ekiti Gubernatorial elections by both *The Guardian* and *The Punch* newspapers. The table reveals out of the total of 303 stories covered by the newspapers, 113 (37%) stories were reported in the negative while 96 (32%) took a positive direction.

Discusssion of Findings

It was also found that activities regarding the Ekiti 2018 Gubernatorial elections were majorly reported in news format. This implies that the studied election were only reported as they occur with no in-depth analyses by both *The Guardian* and *The Punch* newspapers. As indicated in Table 1, a significant majority of 251 representing (88%) of the stories were reported in news formats while features and interviews, which provide in-depth information on an issues or activity, carried 35 (11.5%) and 8 (2.5%) stores respectively. Editorials, regarded as the voice of newspapers, were just three (3) representing (1%) while opinions were represented by 6 (2%) stories – as the election under study. This finding relates to Cummings' (2006) study on how two leading newspapers framed the 2004 presidential elections in the

United States. A total of 173 news articles were analyzed, out of which there were 105 news stories, 50 columns, and 18 editorials.

Revelations of this research further reveal that despite the 303 stories on the studied election published by both *The Guardian* and *The Punch* newspapers only few illustrations (in form of pictures) were used to back up the stories. This is an indication that the forms of reportage of the gubernatorial election under study were packaged without considering the importance of illustrations to the stories by the studied newspapers. For instance, out of the 303 stories on the election, a significant majority of 288 representing (95%) stories were covered and put forward for publication by both *The Guardian* and *Punch* newspapers. This finding is in tandem with Caliendo and Mcllwain (2006) analysis that newspapers make their own choices while giving coverage to the candidate which could be based on race, ethnicity, political parties affiliations, etc.

Findings from this study revealed that despite the considerable coverage and reportage of the elections, little prominence was given to the 2018 Ekiti gubernatorial elections by the newspapers hence only 21 (7%) stories were reported on the front page with none on the back page. This findings is in line with McNair (2007) claim that during elections, the media, who are responsible for educating, informing and enlightening the public do not focus on election issues alone but bring to the fore all kinds of political matters. Results show that in as much as the directionality of the studied stories were 113 (37%), majority of the stories were in a favourable approach considering that an addition of the number of positive dimension of the stories with the neutral ones will amount to 191 (63%). This signifies that because of the direction of reports audience interests were piqued and sustained. This finding is in tandem with Tankard (2001) explanation that when events and issues and appropriately presented, they instigate readers' attention and interest because by giving emphasis to certain aspects and downplaying others, the media can capture and retain the readers' attention to the election-based news stories.

Conclusion

In tune with the major findings of this study, it is concluded that the Ekiti 2018 gubernatorial elections were majorly reported in news format – implying that the election activities were only reported as they occur with no in-depth analyses by both *The Guardian* and *The Punch* newspapers. Revelations of this research further reveal that despite the 303 stories on the studied election published by both *The Guardian* and *The Punch* newspapers only few illustrations (in form of pictures) were used to back up the stories. That little prominence was given to the 2018 Ekiti gubernatorial elections by the newspapers. It is also concluded that majority of the stories were in a favourable direction.

Recommendations

In tandem with the major findings of this research, the following recommendations were made:

i. Electioneering activities should not only be reported in news formats but in other forms such as opinions, features, columns and editorials as this will provide much knowledge to readers as there will be in-depth analyses on the reported activities.
ii. To give high level of prominence to election activities, considerable stories regarding elections should be published in front and back pages tend to be regarded as important by readers. They also attract more attention and interest to readers.
iii. There should be favourable sustainability of the nature or directionality of stories published by newspapers on election matters. This will bring about positive thoughts and action by readers on election activities reported.

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