
Effect of Print Media Reports on Violence: Reflection from the 2019 Oyo State Guber Election

Robert, Chipumbu

Lead City University, Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria, robertchipumbu@gmail.com

Olubunmi Akande

Department of Politics & International Relations, Lead City University, Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria.
dammy_74@yahoo.co.uk

Abstract

Media is regarded as an efficient tool for communication due to its wide coverage. It informs but can as well misinform. This efficiency of media as tool of communication makes governments, political associations, business interests, pressure groups, religious organizations and others to instrumentalise the media in pursuit of their desperate objectives. The research paper critically evaluates the effect of print media reports on violence with a keen reflection from the 2019 Oyo State gubernatorial election. The research objectives are to investigate the links between print media reports and violent incidents in the 2019 Oyo State gubernatorial elections and to determine the overall effect of print media reports on violence in the 2019 Oyo State gubernatorial elections. While the research paper adopts a qualitative approach that involves the use of primary data source (structured interview) and secondary data sources such as academic journals, government reports, and media reports and the Agenda Setting theory, the research finds print media did not report violent incidents up to quarter of their total coverage of three months in the election process of the 2019 Oyo State gubernatorial election. The research paper conclude that the effect of print media reports on electoral violence in Oyo State was that of dousing violence by under reporting it and that of simply framing stories that shifted the attention of readers to peaceful and issue based election campaigns. The research paper recommends the need for the Federal and State Governments to assure maximum security and safe working conditions for media practitioners during election period and the need to create and dedicate special pages in few selected newspapers that are widely read and appreciated in the State to report violence related cases in electioneering period.

Keywords: Effect, Print Media Report, Violence, Gubernatorial Elections

• Introduction

The media are regarded as an efficient tool for communication due to its wide coverage. It informs but can as well misinform. This efficiency of media as tool of communication makes governments, political associations, business interests, pressure groups, religious organizations and others to instrumentalise the media in pursuit of their desperate objectives. A fact easily noticed in military coups in the sense that once there is a coup; a seizure of the media follows immediately. With the advent of mass media, aided by the technological inventions, such as

printing machine, radio, television and other societal issues like political activities, religion, sports, and wedding ceremonies amongst others became amplified with incredible openness (Iredia, 2007). The agenda setting theory, has clearly demonstrated that the dominant view held by a large number of people in society is the image created by the media through consistent reportage of that issue and through that the media changes the view and attitude of people (Daramola, 2016). Thus, it is safe to say that the influence of media on societal behavior is inevitable and cannot be denied. Taking into consideration the same line of thought, that media is an efficient tool of communication, elections begun to receive wide media coverage uncovering electoral malpractices, advocating for legal action and in some cases cancellation of elections. In the case of election violence, defined as a sub-category of political violence in which the purpose of the violence is to influence forthcoming elections or contest the results of the recently concluded elections, media reports can either douse tension or escalate it (Onyebadi & Oyedeji, 2012). For instance, in the 2020 U.S. presidential election, the incumbent President Donald Trump repeatedly, through the media, alleged that he was being rigged out of office during the election which made his supporters to take to the streets in protest of the alleged illegal vote count, leading to pockets of violence in some cities in the U.S. However, other media reports have shown that the claims of electoral fraud are unsubstantiated and their stance have so far been endorsed by more than four (4) different courts across the U.S. including the supreme court which have ruled against President Trump lawsuits against the election for lacking in merit, thus dousing tension in the U.S. in the aftermath of the presidential election (Liptak, 2020).

In India, the local media played a critical role in dousing tension during the 2019 general election by combating huge amount of disinformation spread on social media that led to violence across the country.⁷ Based on the Computational Propaganda project carried out at the University of Oxford, it was observed that more than a quarter of the information shared on Facebook and WhatsApp and a fifth of the information shared on the same platforms by the ruling party Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) and the opposition party, Indian National Congress (INC) respectively during the election were “junk news” or deliberately misleading information. They maintain that the journalists who discredited the disinformation on-line were subjected to harassment likened to a virtual mob lynch-which raises concern in a country where over 30 media professionals who lost their lives first received death threats on-line.

In Africa, after the 1960s, the year of independence for most countries, the continent has been associated with violent elections.⁹ Still talking about Africa, elections in the 1990s have led to

outbreaks of election violence in a wide range of countries including, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Nigeria, Senegal, Uganda and Zimbabwe (Bjarnesen & Soderberg, 2018). It is said that, over 40 elections conducted across Africa between 2011 and 2017 were all marred by violence. In Nigeria for instance, the first set of politicians that established political parties were newspapermen. In other words the media and media men were

in themselves political actors shaping the reports and message to their interest. This was often done in the form of editorials, interviews, questions, commentaries and other specialized programs. In similar situations somewhere else, the media have been implicated in some electoral violence and post-election violence. For instance, the media companies that transmit information in local languages in the Republic of Kenya were believed to be responsible for the ethnic clashes and other forms of violence that characterized the country's election in 2008, as they transmitted vitriolic and inflammatory messages which triggered the violence. Relatedly, two scholars in their research work: *Media War and Conflict*, were of the view that the media were complicit in the post-election violence in Kenya in 2017, in the sense that they sacrificed objectivity on the altar of peace journalism risking the post-election violence that ensued especially in the opposition strongholds (Matingwina, 2019). In Zimbabwe, media bias was also seen in the polarization of the two major media companies, *News Day* and *The Herald*, along political lines helped to entrench division and hatred between supporters of the ruling and opposition parties which crystallized in post-election violence in 2018 (Matingwina, 2019).

Peace scholars contend that covering elections is usually an uphill task for the media in the sense that elections engender heightened political pressure in the news room, increase the attempts to manipulate information and force journalists to work hastily. It is maintained that in a situation of great political tension in which candidates are former belligerents who have just put down their weapons in order to go to the polls, the media operate often in an unsafe and economically damaged environment facing lack of infrastructure, inadequate equipment as well as lack of credibility owing to being a propaganda outlet for former belligerent group. These constraints include shortage of competent staff, which easily led to unbalanced coverage capable of inducing violence. However, despite seeming plausibility of this perspective, it is antithetical to the media credibility which is integral to the conduct of violent free elections as established by the Commonwealth Election Broadcasting Guidelines.

Nigeria is reputed with vibrant media landscape though Freedom House has rated them to be „partly free“ (Demarest & Langer, 2019). Other scholars argue that the media particularly the print media emerged in Nigeria as a tool of anti-colonial struggle and was baptized in the waters of nationalistic propaganda. In fact, Iruonagbe, (2013) in his book, *House of War*, demonstrated an inextricable link between the media and electoral violence when he observed that, in the Second Republic, during the Gubernatorial elections in 1983 in Ondo State between the two candidates, Akin Omoboriowo and Chief Adekunle Ajasin, the two radio stations in the State capital, the Ondo State Broadcasting Corporation (OSBC) and the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), Akure, polarized along the political divide and disseminated inflammatory material that degenerated into violence. Subsequently, elections have been successfully held in Nigeria in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019. However, these elections have never been violent free and the media have always been culpable in one way or the other. It is against this

background that this study intends to examine the impact of print media reports on violence in the 2019 Oyo State Gubernatorial elections with a view to establishing whether they instigated violence or doused it. This research study specifically consider print media reports of *The Tribune Newspaper*, *The Nation Newspaper* and *The Punch Newspaper* from December 2018 to First week of March 2019.

• **Problem Statement**

With reference to peace scholars on mass media and political violence, the media is both a pathfinder as well as a victim in the process of monitoring the power-negotiation process. This reveals the dicey and sensitive nature of the role of the media in the society especially in the conduct of violent free elections. It means that media credibility is sacrosanct to peaceful elections. However, without independent bias reporting, deliberate distortion, sycophancy, criminal partnerships and unprofessionalism will crowd out credibility. This will not only affect their watchdog role as the fourth estate of the realm but can trigger violence in vast proportions. Extant literature has discussed media reports in Nigeria from the standpoint of their involvement in the political process and that of being the watchdog of the society. However, print media reports impact on violence in the 2019 Oyo State Gubernatorial Election is underreported in academic literature. This is the gap that this study intends to fill.

• **Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The aim of this research paper is to critically examine the impact of print media reports on violence with a keen Reflection on the 2019 Oyo State gubernatorial elections. However, the specific objectives include;

- To investigate the links between print media reports and violent incidents in the 2019 Oyo State gubernatorial elections.
- To determine the overall effect of print media reports on violence in the 2019 Oyo State gubernatorial elections.

• **Methodology**

This research paper adopts a qualitative approach that involves the use of primary data source (structured interview) and secondary data sources such as newspapers, academic journals, government reports, and media reports. The choice of qualitative approach is adopted because it allows for an in-depth analysis of the effect of print media reports on violence. Data collected is analysed via content analysis.

- **Literature Review**
- **The Concept of Print Media**

Mass Media refers to the main means of communication, especially the newspapers, radio and television, regarded collectively. The Merriam Webster Dictionary adds that it is the system and organization of communication through which information gets across to a large number of people. It is also said that the process through which ideas and information are publicised and disseminated to the general public is "publication". However, it is also noted that the major means of publication is through the Mass Media, which according to Premenand (2012), is synonymous with Mass Communication.

Traditionally, the Mass Media is divided into two; the Electronic Media and the Print Media. However one can add the Digital being the third and most recent. The Print Media includes newspapers, magazines, books, handbills and other forms of publication, while Electronic Media includes the radio, television and the internet (Daramola, 2016). However, the main responsibilities of the Mass Media in general according to Daramola, (2016), include the following;

- To keep the people and government informed.
- To provide a means of communication among the people.
- To serve as watchdog on the activities of government, government officials and members of the public in general.
- To provide a voice for the people by giving the strong, weak, rich, poor, young, and old the right to express their views irrespective of how primitive, sensible or irrational the view may be.
- A trend setter as a medium for socialization and social engineering.
- A market for the presentation of ideas and opinion.
- A vehicle for change.
- A medium of enormous influence on people's views, attitudes, judgments, lifestyles and values.
- A means of entertainment and relaxation.
- A help to the people in the making of an informed decision.

- **Print Media and Electoral Violence in Nigeria**

According to the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), electoral conflict and violence can be defined as, "any random or organized act or threat to intimidate, physically harm, blackmail, or abuse a political stakeholder in seeking to determine, delay, or to otherwise influence an electoral process." On the other hand, Jeff Fischer (2002), defines electoral violence as, "any violence (harm) or threat of violence (harm) that is aimed at disrupting any part of the electoral or political process during the election period". It can also be defined as any form or kind of elections-related violence. However, such violence generally involves: political parties, their supporters, journalists, agents of government, election administrators and the general population which include threats, assault, murder, destruction of property, and physical or

psychological harm. Nwolise (2007) classifies the components of electoral violence into three main divisions: physical, psychological, and structural forms of violence, while others argue that elections violence are basically of four related categories: intra-party feuding, inter-party clashes, electoral event violence, and communal unrest.

There are five sequential periods in an election when election violence can occur according to Fischer (2002);

1. Identity conflict can occur during the registration process, when refugees or other migrants from conflict regions are unable to establish or re-establish their officially recognised identities.
2. Campaign conflict can occur as rivals seek to disrupt the opponents' campaigns, intimidate voters and candidates, and use threats and violence to influence participation in the voting.
3. Balloting conflict can occur on Election Day when rivalries are played out at the polling station.
4. Results conflict can occur when there are disputes over election results and judicial mechanisms are unable to resolve such disputes in a fair, timely and transparent manner.
5. Representation conflict can occur when elections are organized as „zero-sum“ events and „losers“ are left out of participation in governance.

The following categories suggest a variety of motives, victims and perpetrators according to Okolo, (2014);

1. Voters in conflict with the state and claiming unfairness in the election process (Thailand, Zambia);
2. The state in conflict with voters who challenge the election results or the electoral hegemony of the state (Chad, Belarus);
3. Political rivals in conflict with each other for political gain (Yemen, Benin, the Philippines, Uganda, Fiji, Seychelles, Pakistan, The Gambia, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka);
4. A blend of the above three categories.

As afore-stated, in Nigeria, electoral violence is traced to the First Republic. The three dominant political parties then were the Action Group (AG), the Northern People's Congress (NPC) and the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons (NCNC). These parties were ethnically based. The AG was considered Yorubas, the NCNC was purely Igbos, while the NPC was predominantly Hausa-Fulanis. Each of these parties struggled to increase their numerical strength and to spread their influence to regions other than theirs. The elections witnessed gross irregularities and violence and it posed a serious challenge to the Nigerian fledgling democracy, precipitating a military coup at the end of the day. Also, as noted already above, the 1983 elections were massively rigged. A scholar maintained that the announcement of the elections results caused great violence which necessitated the military's ousting the newly elected President, Shehu Shagari on December 31, 1983 (Dare Babarinsa,2002).

Equally noted already, the 1993 elections considered to be the fairest and freest was annulled by General Ibrahim Babangida, the then military head of state. This caused serious upheaval in the country. Nonetheless, another scholar opined that neither the Muslim-Muslim ticket of the SDP flag bearer nor the fact that the two parties contesting had Muslims as their flag bearers amounted to any issue. The Social Democratic Party (SDP) flag bearer MKO Abiola a Southern Nigerian Muslim had Alhaji Babagana Kingibe, a Northern Muslim as a running mate, while the NRC flag bearer a Muslim for Kano had Sylvester Ugoh, a Christian from Eastern Nigeria as running mate. The winner of the elections threatened mutiny and this led the Gen. Ibrahim Babangida to step aside and hand over power to an interim government led by Chief Ernest Shonekan, who was dethroned by General Sani Abacha, who arrested MKO for treason (for declaring himself as the president). General Sani Abacha died while still the Head of State, while MKO also died on the day he was to come out of prison. Giving the demise of General Sani Abacha, General Abdulsalami Abubakar became Head of State in June 1998. He immediately set to arrange for the return to democracy. According to the reports of the Commonwealth Observer Group, Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar established the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), which on the 27 February 1999, conducted an election won by Olusegun Obasanjo of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), a former military head of state. The reports further held that although the election was characterized by irregularities, it still reflected the will of Nigerians. More so, with regards to the 2003 elections, the print media reports states that,

...in most of Nigeria, despite significant challenges, genuine and largely successful effort was made to enable the people to vote freely and that in most of the country conditions were such as to enable the will of people to be expressed. However, there were parts of Nigeria in which many Nigerians were denied the right to participate in authentic democratic process (Common Wealth, 2019).

The reports still observed that the 2007 and 2011 elections were replete with irregularities, leading to serious violence, the later claiming at least 850 "when demonstrations against the outcome turned into violent clashes with security forces in Plateau, Bauchi, Katsina, Kano and Kaduna states.

The print media reports still encapsulates the circumstances around 2015 and 2019 elections, establishing that the former was free and fair regardless of the religious and ethnic politics and threat that heralded it, while the latter launched Nigeria into more untoward circumstances, of which it was stated:

In addition to the long-standing conflict with Boko Haram in the North East, there were growing clashes between cattle herders and settled farmers throughout Northern Nigeria and the Middle-Belt. While these clashes were primarily over access to grazing land, the conflict had been politicized – particularly along religious and ethnic lines. It is reported that more than 1,000 Nigerians died in 2018 due to herder/farmer conflict and inter-religious clashes. Long-standing

inter-communal conflicts flared up violently, with substantial loss of life. In addition, a growing number of kidnappings, armed robbery, thuggery and banditry contributed to an environment of fear and insecurity in some parts of the country. Police and security efforts were stepped up across the country in response, especially ahead of the elections (Ibid).

Generally, in what concerns the elections in Nigeria with its different regions, the media has always been visible, either used pro or against the ruling party or government. Its impact, on election violence, can only be determined by a critical look at a given election of a specific year.

a. Theoretical Framework

The theory adopted for this research paper is the agenda setting theory.

b. Agenda Setting Theory

The beginning of agenda setting theory can be traced as far back as 1922 when Walter Lippmann expressed his concern on the vital role that mass media can play in influencing the setting of certain image on the public's mind (Razinah, 2014). The Agenda Setting Theory discusses how the media agenda influences public opinion and affects public behavior. The term agenda setting theory was first used by McCombs and Shaw. This theory elaborates the connection in terms of the relationships between the emphasis that the mass media put as an issue and the media audiences or the public's reaction or attributes to such issue. Some scholars also state that the Agenda Setting model posits that there is a correlation between aggregated measures of media issue coverage and public opinion survey measures of issue importance at a single point in time represent evidence of media agenda-setting.

The agenda setting theory begins as an explanation on how the mass media affects the change pattern in political behavior during elections. The theory has inspired and developed hundreds of latter explorations on how the mass media frames issues for their audiences and how the mass media paints an event in their reports and is considered as responsible in influencing and shaping the public opinion and agenda. Such influence of mass media on the public agenda or opinion can happen intentionally or unintentionally (Razinah, 2014). Continuously, the Agenda Setting Theory stands as important theory not only on mass communication, but extends to other related social science studies such as political communication. Under the agenda setting theory, the mass media is believed not to possess the ability to set the public agenda especially in matters of opinions or attitudes.¹⁷⁰ However, the mass media has a particular access in contributing to or influencing the audience's perceptions, values, focus and priorities. With such influence from the mass media, the media audiences tend to form their own opinion or focus on those issues that are considered as worthy of inclusion on their mental agendas.

c. Agenda Setting Theory and Elections

Agenda Setting Theory emphasizes that the mass media filters and shapes of what we see or are told, and as such does seldom report actual realities. Its underlying principle is that the more attention the media focuses on an issue, the more relevant the issue becomes to the general public. Some researchers state that the general elections since the return to the present democratic era in 1999 have been intensely covered by all forms of mass media; both print and e-media. The authors continue to say that, competing political parties, especially the most prominent ones, have been assured of fair coverage with substantial degrees of influence in some media outlets than others depending on ownership and other peculiar considerations. Abuses, irregularities and other political gimmicks were fully documented, monitored and sometimes cautioned (Ogundiwin, 2020). The mainstream media have also been found maintaining a deadly neutral stand (between parties) in matters of electoral outcomes, or possibly compromising with the political leadership to support the acceptance of the flawed outcomes of elections rather than canvassing its rejection and/or cancellation. By this, certain acts of electioneering brigandage are either unreported or under-reported. However, deep-seated internal and external challenges continually hamstrung the viability of the media space.

Ogundiwin (2020), go further to advice that the media should endeavour always, as a matter of responsibility, report to douse political tensions in the country instead of going to town with its explosive and misleading headlines and news stories. The media should be skillful in its reportage such that it assures the society of media's sincerity and patriotism, and leave no doubt in the people's mind of her professionalism.

4.1 Discussion of Findings

4.2 Investigating the Links between Print Media Reports and Violent Incidents in the 2019 Oyo State Gubernatorial Elections

According to the data gathered, the print media did not report violent incidents up to quarter of their total coverage of three months in the election process of the 2019 Oyo State gubernatorial election. The following are the violent-incident articles gathered by the researcher as published by the three media houses: Nigerian Tribune, The Nation and Punch:

Oyo AD Guber Candidate Attacked by Unidentified Person

By Tunde Ogunesan

The political climate in Oyo state was saved of an unexpected crisis on Friday morning, when the gubernatorial candidate of the Alliance for Democracy (AD) in the state, Oyedele Hakeem Alao, escaped death by whiskey where he was attacked at his campaign office at Oke-Itunu area of Ibadan by an unidentified man who destroyed the side glass of his ash colour Armada Nissan

Jeep with registration number Lagos KJA 502 FH in the process. The Director General, Oyedele Hakeem Alao Campaign Organisation, Barrister Ademola Adeniji while addressing journalists at the campaign office on Friday, stated that the attacker whose identity cannot be confirmed as at the time of filing this story also went away with the food flask of the candidate (Nigerian Tribune, 2018).

The above article does not link the violent acts to any political party. It simply describes the incident and rolls out the damages and the unpleasant event. It is very clear that the article is far from inciting violence or escalating it. From all the considerations, the article does not point to who may be responsible for the violent acts. Surely the article is a report of a violent incident but limits itself to the presentation of the scene.

Punch newspaper reported:

Hoodlums Burn Down Houses, Shops in Ibadan, Police Arrest 11

By Ademola Babalola

The Oyo State police command on Sunday confirmed the arrest of 11 suspects in connection with the mayhem wreaked on three areas of Ibadan between Friday and Sunday. Our correspondent gathered that the hoodlums had been disturbing the peace of the city for days, setting houses, vehicles and shops ablaze, and looting with reckless abandon. The affected areas are Ojagbo in Ibadan North- East, the back of the Oyo State All Progressive Congress Secretariat, Oke-Ado, Ibadan South-East local government area, and Idi-Arere, a suburb of the area where „one million boys“ operated for weeks in 2008 (Punch, 2019).

The above article reports a violent incident with details. This article too, does not link the arrested persons to any political party. There is no insinuation about the said violent acts. The media report gives credit to the police and at the same time it gives assurance to the populations about the end of a certain disturbance in the city.

Another article carried the following story:

My Life at Risk, Federal Lawmaker Raises the Alarm After Attack in Ibadan

By Moses Alao

Son of former Oyo State governor and member representing Ibadan North-East and Ibadan South-East federal constituency, Honourable Adedayo Lam Adesina (Omo Oloore), on Friday, raised the alarm that his life might still be at risk, stating how he was attacked by suspected political thugs during campaign...The hoodlums numbering about 50, Saturday Tribune learnt, attacked Lam Adesina“s entourage during his campaign visit to ward 2 of the local government,

though no casualty was recorded. Similar attitudes had taken place on his constituency office and bill boards (Nigerian Tribune, 2019).

This again is a descriptive article of a violent incident that does not accuse nor point at any political suspect. It remains neutral but passes the message of violent atmosphere in the election campaigns.

The following article also appeared in the print media:

Lanlehin Escapes Unhurt as Hoodlums Attack an ADC Campaign Rally, Disrupt It

By Dayo Salami

Today in Ilora, Afijio local government area of Oyo State, as hoodlums suspected to be members of the opposition attacked the campaign train of the ADC governorship candidate, Senator Olufemi Lanlehin, vandalizing several vehicles and injuring many of his loyalists...troubles started after Lanlehin mounted the podium as the hoodlums begun firing sporadic gunshots...several supporters sustained physical injuries. Several buses belonging to Lanlehin were also vandalized. As at the time this report was gathered, the cause of the attack is yet to be ascertained (Nigerian Tribune, 2019).

The article above gives a clear description of a violent attack on a campaign rally. Even though the story does not mention the precise opposition political party the hoodlums belonged to, it provokes emotional reaction from the attacked named political party members. This kind of

report could easily escalate violence, as it made mention of the fact that the suspected attackers were members of the opposition party.

Punch published article read:

One Killed, Several Injured in Oyo APC, PDP Campaign Rallies

By Ademola Babalola

One supporter of the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) in Oyo State, Salaudeen Surajudeen, has died during a clash at the weekend with members of the opposition Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). Several others were seriously injured. Sarajudeen was said to have been found lying in a pool of his blood following an attack at igbora in Ibarapa local government area on Saturday evening. Others who sustained several cuts were said to be recovering from treatment at undisclosed medical facilities in the area. The incident is coming on the heels of the PDP governorship candidate, Seyi Makinde, that police commissioner Abiodun Odude, should summon an emergency security meeting. Makinde said this would reduce incessant attacks by members of the states chapter of the National Union of the Road Transport Workers (NURTW).

The PDP candidate last Thursday was attacked in Ojoo area of the city, leaving one person injured and a vehicle damaged while returning from a campaign tour of council areas in Oyo town. Also the APC campaign rally was attacked around 5:30 pm in Ibarapa on Saturday. Gunmen reportedly opened fire at the rally (Punch, 2019).

This published report gives an account of violent encounter between two political parties, the ruling party and an opposition party, thus indicating an aggressive atmosphere at campaign rallies towards the gubernatorial election. This report leaves a direct influence on followers of either political party. It has a very high possibility of escalating violence. Readers of this report are likely to be emotionally moved with vengeance. Sad acts are mentioned without giving the names of the perpetrators.

Another media report narrated that:

Two Feared Dead, Many Injured at APC Campaign Rally in Oyo

By Editor, picked from The News Agency of Nigeria (NAN)

Two people were reported to have died and many injured in a bloody clash between suspected political hoodlums at an All Progressive Congress (APC) campaign rally in Igbora area of Oyo State. The News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) reported that the incident happened immediately after the rally was held at the old motor park in Igbora on Saturday evening. NAN reported that the campaign trail, led by governor Abiola Ajimobi, begun with a road show from Lanlate through Igbora, Idere, Ayete...It was a peaceful rally which saw the Governor and the

party's gubernatorial candidate Chief Adebayo Adedun, acknowledging cheers from supporters who had thronged the streets to show solidarity for the party. Trouble, however, started immediately after the rally in Igbora as suspected political thugs engaged in a bloody clash which left one dead. Eye witnesses told NAN that some suspected hoodlums had surrounded the APC gubernatorial candidate to demand for money but were blocked by another group of hoodlums (Nigerian Tribune, 2019).

This article remains descriptive and does not mention exactly who was responsible for the violence. However, it recounts a violent and sad situation linked to electoral activities. It remains news of what happened. The report above cannot be directly be held responsible for inciting any other violence that might occur after reading it.

4.3 Exploring the Effect of Print Media Reports on Violence in the 2019 Oyo State Guber Election

Standing on the theory of Agenda Setting, that, the dominant view held by a large number of people in society is the image created by the media through consistent reportage of that issue,³⁸ one cannot deny the reality that media reports make impact on electoral process.

In Oyo State, urban areas, where the researcher concentrated for data collection through semi-structured interviews, the culture of newspaper reading is averagely good near markets, bus stops and stationary shops. One can easily spot groups of people reading in public, even though not buying the newspapers but they browse on the headlines of major stories. Out of the data collected from the print media houses: Nigerian Tribune, The Nation and Punch, published articles that were directly related to electoral violence could not make up to quarter of the total three months coverage done on the 2019 Oyo State gubernatorial election. Similarly, majority of the published articles (also uploaded on electronic media as soft copy) were issue based from the different political parties that participated in the election. Most of the campaigns covered by the three media houses were majorly on campaign promises to electorates: what the party and its candidates intend to do for them and the State.

However, from the data collected by interviews, the researcher found out that some violent incidents talked about by those who were interviewed in some local governments, were not published by the print media houses. Thus, making it look like an intentional act to douse electoral violence. From more data gathered, the researcher found out that, out of the three media houses used for the research, only the Nigerian Tribune Newspapers covered 2019 Oyo State gubernatorial election up to three quarters of its published articles in all the three months presented. In December 2018, The Nation Newspapers and Punch Newspapers published only ten (10) articles related to 2019 Oyo State gubernatorial election, while Nigerian Tribune Newspapers published forty four (44) articles of which a good number were paid for interviews

and campaign rally messages with images. In January 2019, The Nation Newspapers published only ten (10) articles directly linked to Oyo State gubernatorial election and Punch Newspapers published only four (4) articles, while Nigerian Tribune Newspapers published forty two articles

(42). In February 2019, the peak to the election, The Nation Newspapers and Punch Newspaper published two (2) articles each, while Nigerian Tribune Newspapers published eight (8) articles. In March the week to election, The Nation Newspapers had no article published, Punch Newspapers had one (1) article while Nigerian Tribune Newspaper had only two (2) articles.

Far from violence, the three print media houses: Nigerian Tribune, The Nation and Punch Newspapers, reported more on alliances among different political parties to win the election. In fact, through the three months newspaper coverage of December 2018 to March 2019, the print

media gave more attention to intra-party disputes of political parties. The clear impact of print media on violence in the 2019 Oyo State gubernatorial election, is visible in the very fact that, the print media reports did not intentionally report violent incidents but carried campaign promises and issue based rallies. Even as the election came closer in the month of February 2019, the print media did not create any atmosphere of panic to electorates.

5.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, the research study analysed ways and to what extent print media reports made impact on electoral violence in the 2019 Oyo State gubernatorial election, using semi-structured interview and content analysis methods. Above all, the researcher found out that reporting on electoral violence was never given a priority face by the print media houses during the election coverage. The findings from the three newspapers worked on showed that the articles that covered the election related stories were majorly on campaign promises, vote vying, political manifestos and general coverage of campaign rallies to endorse candidates. Other findings from the study also showed that, Nigerian Tribune Newspapers reported more election related stories than The Nation and Punch Newspapers. In all the election related published articles by the three media houses, the few published articles on electoral violence cannot be strongly classified as inciting or escalating violence during the 2019 Oyo State gubernatorial election.

Furthermore, issues identified in the election coverage in the period under study included: the influence of political party in power on media houses, sponsored political thugs and enticing money privileges promised and availed to media practitioners by some political parties and candidates in view of getting a wide election campaign coverage from the media. The print media had to play its role in the midst of all these challenges. The researcher observed that in the whole election coverage by the three aforementioned newspapers, none of them published an article on violence and placed it on the front page or gave it a half or full page coverage. Only one election violence related story got a headline on the front page of a newspaper. The few published articles on violence were all placed inside the newspaper with not more than a quarter page coverage. It should also be stated that the link between print media reports and violence

was only limited to the reporting of violent acts with its damages as they happened to the populations

The researcher came to a firm conclusion that, even though there were some differences in reporting when it came to violence during the election period, the three print media houses: Nigerian Tribune, The Nation and Punch, did not incite or escalate violence. The effect of print media reports on electoral violence was that of dousing violence by under reporting it and that of simply framing stories that shifted the attention of readers to peaceful and issue based election campaigns.

5.2 Recommendations

The research study thereby makes the following recommendations;

1. The reactions from the interview respondents pointed out that some violent incidents witnessed in some areas of local governments were not reported by the print media. This was also confirmed by the data collected from newspaper coverage of the election period that few articles on violence were published by the three under studied newspapers: Nigerian Tribune, The Nation and Punch. However, some interviewed media practitioners also mentioned the threats they witnessed from the political thugs who seemed to be hired by competing political parties and candidates during the election campaigns.

Thus, there is need for the Federal and State Governments to assure maximum security and safe working conditions for media practitioners during election period. All involved political parties and their respective candidates should also be made to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to commit to the good conduct of their followers and supporters. This will give encouragement to the media practitioners to even go deeper in the election coverage.

2. The research findings also disclosed that the media reports that covered the election related stories were majorly on campaign promises, sponsored interviews of some candidates, campaign manifestos and coverage of campaign rallies. All these involved money from political parties and their candidates to the media houses. They seemed to be a big temptation to the media houses to make more money than inform and educate people on real issues during the election period.

Therefore, the Federal and State Governments together with interested stakeholders need to encourage and financially support independent journalists who are not attached to any business registered media house, this will provide and improve balance in media coverage during election period

3. Other research findings disclosed that out of the three newspapers used in the study: Nigerian Tribune, The Nation and Punch, only the Nigerian Tribune Newspapers gave up to quarter coverage of election related stories out of its general normal published articles in three months.

The researcher also discovered a very low appearance of election related articles in The Nation and Punch newspapers.

Hence, to improve the coverage of election related stories in the print media, there is need to create and dedicate special pages in few selected newspapers that are widely read and appreciated in the State. This could be sponsored and coordinated by the stakeholders and other independent groups like democracy advocates groups. It is not enough to only come and observe and monitor an election in a day.

4. The researcher also observed that in all the three months print media coverage very few violent incidents were published. In fact, even the few reported violent incidents remained very professionally written. In the published articles there was no mention of ascertained people responsible for the violent acts, no political party or candidate condemned, but the violent acts were clearly described and regretted. The print media in its election coverage on violence remained professional.

Therefore, it should be emphasized that there is need to appreciate more and encourage print media houses on their professionalism. This may continue to entice and encourage them. Stakeholders and peace advocacy groups could introduce special awards of recognition for journalists on election coverage in the State. This should be widely advertised and celebrated.

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