

## **Appraisal of Impact of Ownership on Framing of Insecurity by Newspapers during the 2023 Election Campaigns in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

In their bid to make meaning out of the complex happenings in society, the media often deviate from the path of objectivity and this leads to subtle or glaring bias, which translates to framing of content. Framing is believed to come easy when an emotive issue such as insecurity is the subject of reportage. It becomes easier when insecurity is mixed up with elections, which are considered very important by the elite class and for which they deploy many weapons, including the media, which they also often own or control. This study, under-girded by the Frames theory, explored the framing of insecurity during the campaigns preceding the 2023 elections in Nigeria. The objectives included finding out the main frames used in reporting insecurity, and uncovering the extent to which the partisan and ethnic orientations of newspaper owners affected the reportage of insecurity. The researchers, using content analysis, examined the output of five online newspapers, Sahara Reporters, Premium Times, Daily Sun, Daily Trust and The Nation, during the months of September to December, 2022 as these four months featured election primaries and the kick-off of campaigns for all positions. The findings were that the dominant frames included the Containment Efforts, Hopelessness and Political frames. The researchers also found out that all five online newspapers framed to take care of the interests of the owners and possibly influence the outcome of the election. They, therefore, recommended a re-training of journalists to mitigate the effects of media capture and a review of newspaper ownership laws so as to outlaw ownership by individuals or groups that are active, card-carrying members of political parties in the country.

**Key Words: Frames, Insecurity, Ownership, Elections, Campaigns**

### **Background to the Study**

Nigeria is presently plagued by insecurity such that at least 14,641 persons were killed from January 2019 to December 2021 while over 5,000 were abducted and 6,895 killed in 2021 alone (Eromosele, 2022). These occurrences have been garnering negative security reviews for the country and in 2022, Nigeria was at the 143rd position out of 163 countries on the Global Peace Index (Odeniyi, 2022). Major culprits include the Boko Haram sect and the Fulani herdsmen who have since been joined by other organised entities such as bandits, kidnappers, arsonists and some separatist groups like the Indigenous People of Biafra, the Eastern Security Network and the Yoruba Nation (Sahara Reporters, 2021; Elijah, 2022; Eromosele, 2022; Aladekomo, 2021). The high level of insecurity has led to the closure of many schools, especially in northern Nigeria; great reduction in food production; low level of investment in certain regions; a series of attacks on security agents, arson, kidnapping for ransom, and destruction of state infrastructure (Gabriel, 2022; Abdullah, 2022; Nwanna, 2020; Ugwu, 2022).

Some of the more notable acts associated with insecurity in Nigeria include the 2014 Chibok girls' abduction, the 2011 bombing of the United Nations building in Abuja, the 2022 Abuja-Kaduna train kidnap, the 2021 sacking of the Nigeria Defence Academy, and the bombing of the Nigeria Police headquarters in 2011 (Ross, 2014; Voice of America, 2011; Uwaj, 2022; Abdullahi, 2011; Shiklam, & Nwezeh, 2021). The security situation has gone so bad that Nigeria keeps being blacklisted through travel advisories issued by several western nations (Ume-Ezeoke, 2022).

As it is to be expected, the media have been carrying out their traditional roles of informing the citizenry as well as helping them make meaning out of a situation that seems to defy solutions (Dare, Bamidele, & Oluwasanmi, 2020). This latter function, though, is where the media may attempt a departure from the expected objectivity and fair play. Literature is replete with instances where the media deviated from fair play and skewed narratives to suit certain interests, otherwise known as framing (Simiyu, 2013; Edogor, Dike & Agbana, 2015; Wang, 2003; Nwammuo, Edegoh & Iwok, 2015). Norris, Kern, and Just (2003) pointed out that the tendency is greater in instances where terrorism or associated ills are involved. Watson and Hill (2015) tagged this a situation where the watchdog is now a guard dog and often a lapdog. Akpan and Nwosu (2015) believe that framing is brought about by the factor of media ownership, conflict of interest, competition for audience/readers and media capture.

Framing insecurity during elections is not new to Nigeria as there were insinuations that insecurity, especially the Chibok girls' abduction, was a major campaign issue and lent itself to bias in reportage during the 2015 elections in Nigeria (Oyeyipo, Segun & Sanda, 2016). Ekeanyanwu (2015) stated that security was a major campaign issue and that with the relentless bombings by Boko Haram and the internationalisation of the Chibok incident, a resort to propaganda was possible. He pointed out that this seemed likely in the light of patterns of media ownership and the leading interests during the campaigns and the high chances of a media capture (Ekeanyanwu, 2015). Oyeyipo, Segun, and Sanda (2016) insisted that there was a blurring of boundaries between the media and politicians, especially in the mode of reportage of the Chibok abductions, during the 2015 election campaigns.

During the 2015 and 2019 elections, the two leading political parties were the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC); in 2023 these two parties were joined by a third strong party, the Labour Party (LP). In 2015, political interests were believed to have run along ethnic divides (International Crisis Group, 2014) leading to a situation where a whole media bloc could be captured and utilised for propaganda by political interests; the situation may likely be the same in the 2023 elections (Adepetun, 2023).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Most research efforts on the framing of insecurity during elections in Nigeria seemed to stop with the extensive studies done with regards to the Chibok abductions and the 2015 elections (Ngwu, Ekwe & Chiaha, 2015; Edogor, Dike & Agbana, 2015; Dunu, & Okafor, 2017)). There are very few follow-ups even though the insecurity got worse when the 2019 elections were held.

This study is a revisiting of media ownership and framing of insecurity during elections and campaigns in Nigeria post-2015 with a view to discovering whether there is a change in trends. It is more of a longitudinal view of frames deployed in the coverage of insecurity during elections, especially after the Chibok incident, and the 2015 elections. It is also an effort to study framing of insecurity in online versions of Nigerian newspapers where most of the aforementioned studies were carried out on hard copy newspapers.

### **Research Objectives**

The main objective of this study was to find out whether ethnic and partisan orientations of newspaper owners affected the framing of insecurity in online newspapers during the 2023 election campaigns in Nigeria and the specific objectives are:

1. To uncover dominant frames used in the coverage of insecurity during the 2023 election campaigns in Nigeria by online newspapers
2. To find out if the political affiliations of newspaper proprietors determined frames used in the coverage of insecurity during the 2023 election campaigns in Nigeria by online newspapers

3. To find out if the ethnic orientations of newspaper proprietors determined frames used in the coverage of insecurity during the 2023 election campaigns in Nigeria by online newspapers

### **Justification**

This study contributes to the growing body of research on framing, media ownership and insecurity in Nigeria and in a global arena bedeviled by conflicts and insecurity situations. It will also serve the purpose of a longitudinal view of media ownership and insecurity reportage during elections in Nigeria.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Ownership and Objectivity in Media Coverage**

Media scholars agree that the media usually take on the colouration of the societies in which they operate just as they can either make or mar the society depending on what use they are put to (Alegu, Maku & Onu, 2020). Echoing the above scholars, Udoakah (2017) contends that the type of journalism practiced anywhere in the world is majorly informed by the social and economic system in that particular society. Moreover, Ojebode (2013) concurs with the above observation by arguing that a journalist's elbow room, which he conceptualises as the extent of freedom that a journalist is given to discharge his official responsibilities, is usually narrow in an autocratic nation and this accounts for why journalists who attempted to expand their elbow room during military dictatorship in Nigeria were severely punished. Objectivity with regards to media reportage of issues could be seen as synonymous with neutrality (Asogwa & Asemah, 2012) and carries with it notions of fairness, accuracy, balance, neutrality and lack of bias in the media (Roma, 2007 in Asogwa & Asemah, 2012). Similarly, Tuchman (1978) cited in Omenugha and Oji (2013, p. 13) contends that objectivity is a mechanism which allows the journalists to hide even from themselves the 'constructed' and 'partial' nature of their stories." Asogwa and Asemah (2012) observe that even though the media are expected to function as free enterprises as held by the social responsibility theory of the press, they are expected to do so with a sense of responsibility; however, on the contrary, the media seem to have compromised in the discharge of their duties in pursuit of pecuniary interests and profit maximisation.

Ownership, to a very large extent, determines the level of objectivity of the mass media. For example, Asemah and Omula (2013) did a study which found that 93.75% of respondents said that news commercialisation is an impediment to objectivity. This means that the commercial interest of the owner of a media outlet over-rides every other consideration when deciding what to publish and what not to publish. Although the NBC Code (as cited in Omenugha & Oji, 2013) requires that commercials in news should be presented in such a manner that it will be clearly differentiated from content, sometimes, commercials are presented as news. According to the scholars, this challenges the notions of objectivity in Nigerian news reports. They argue that news commercialisation occurs at institutional level wherein media establishments charge official fees for sponsored news and at individual level where the journalist demands for money in order to cover or report an event.

Besides news commercialisation, other ways through which objectivity in news media is adversely affected are through the 'ethnicisation' and politicisation of the media to suit their proprietors. Accordingly, Alegu, Maku and Onu (2020) contend that the media tend to turn themselves into ethnic warriors so as to champion the cause of the ethnic groups and political parties to which their owners belong. This accounts for why newspapers, for instance, have been given ethnic tags such as Hausa Press, Igbo Press, Yoruba Press and the Minority Press (Udoakah, 2017) or Ngbati Press, Igbo Press, Arewa Press and Niger Delta Press (Oso, n.d.) depending on the ethnicities of their proprietors.

#### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on the Frames Analysis theory. The theory was propounded by Erving Goffman in 1974. Framing refers to a process through which individuals "develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue" (Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 104). Framing theory is anchored on the

premise that there are a variety of perspectives from which an issue can be seen. According to Entman (1993) in McQuail (2010), framing involves selection and salience. This presupposes that in framing, some issues are ignored whereas some issues are highlighted and emphasised and relevance is attached to some issues over others. In other words, framing highlights some aspects of reality and downplays others. This accounts for why McQuail (2010, p. 380) contends that framing “is a way of giving some overall interpretation to isolated items of fact”.

Framing theory challenged the idea of journalistic objectivity in news reporting but favoured a situation where journalism serves as a forum through which ideas about social world are presented and debated (Baran & Davis, 2012). This implies accepting that media focus attention on some issues over others as the theory believes that the manner and language in which issues are presented determine audience perception of the issues. Entman (1993) cited in Obaje (2017, p. 11) argues that news frames can be identified through “the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments”. Also, Tankard (2010 in Obaje, 2017) presents a more comprehensive framing mechanisms to include headlines, sub-heads, photos, photo captions, leads, source selection, quotes selection, pull quotes, logos, statistics and charts and concluding statements. This theory is suitable for this study because how insecurity is framed by newspapers in Nigeria can influence how the audience perceives the situation in the country, the government and candidates of political parties in the 2023 elections.

### **Empirical Review**

Demarest, Godefroidt and Langer (2020), undertook a comparative study of news coverage of Boko Haram activities in two Nigerian newspapers, The Guardian and Daily Trust, whose owners are of Southern and Northern Nigeria extractions respectively. Southern Nigeria is believed to be Christian-dominated while Northern Nigeria is believed to be Muslim-dominated. The study set out to ascertain how Nigerian media from both Northern and Southern perspectives report the Boko Haram insurgency and how to explain the observed similarities and/or differences between Western media and Nigerian media with regards to out-group representation of Muslims.

The study adopted a combination of content analysis and expert interviews in gathering data. The researchers found out that there are no significant differences between the number of Christian and Muslim victims of the Boko Haram insurgency reported; that both newspapers devoted almost similar level of attention to each of the frames and frame actors; and that there were slight differences between political leaning and religious leaning as the causes going by the reports of The Guardian and Daily Trust newspapers. In each of the two causes of Boko Haram insurgency, The Guardian had higher percentages than Daily Trust. Also, the two newspapers gave religious and criminalising labels to Boko Haram but in each case, The Guardian had slightly higher percentages than Daily Trust. The reviewed study is similar to the present study because both studied the effect of ownership on the framing of insecurity. However, while the present study focused on the ethnic and partisan orientations of the owners, Demarest et al., (2020) concentrated on the religious inclinations of the owners of the newspapers.

In a related study by Ojebuyi and Ekennia (2013), there is yet another effort to examine how ownership influences the reportage of conflict, especially when certain key players in the conflict are known allies of newspaper owners. The study examined the coverage of the political feud between the now late Chief Lamidi Adedibu, known as the ‘strong man of Ibadan politics’ and his political son, Senator Rashidi Ladoja, in Oyo State, Nigeria between 2005 and 2007. The research was underpinned by the framing theory and content analysis was used to get out data on how The Nigerian Tribune and The Nation newspapers treated the political conflict in the area of the degree of prominence accorded stories on the two principal actors and how ownership factor and political affiliation shaped the contents of the newspapers. The researchers found that The Nation, a newspaper believed to be owned by a stalwart of the now defunct Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), was less

critical of Senator Rashidi Ladoja and reported more of anti-Adedibu stories. The Nigerian Tribune, on the other hand, reported more of anti-Ladoja stories, and was less critical of Chief Lamidi Adedibu. Both newspapers clearly took sides and skewed stories to favour parties that are allies to the newspaper owners. This and the present study examined influence of ownership on the reporting of conflict but differ in that the present study is analysing content from online versions and also factored in both ethnic and partisan affiliations while Ojebuyi and Ekennia (2013) did not clearly define these ownership variables and analysed content from hard copy newspapers.

In a similar study entitled, “Nigerian Newspapers Framing of the Chibok School Girls Abduction: A Study of The Guardian, Daily Sun, The Trust and Leadership Newspapers”, Ngwu, Ekwe and Chiaha (2015) examined how the selected newspapers reported the kidnap of the Chibok school girls by the Boko Haram terrorists. The study, anchored on Framing theory of Erving Goffman, utilised both content analysis and survey research methods and investigated nuances using the rescue efforts, hopelessness, political, religious, ethnic and economic frames. Two of the newspapers (Daily Trust and Leadership newspapers) are owned by persons of Northern Nigeria extraction and the owners of the other two (The Guardian and The Sun) are of Southern Nigeria extraction. The study found out that, although the Southern Nigeria-based newspapers had more stories that emphasised the rescue efforts of the then Federal Government led by a Southerner, the difference in the usage of that frame was negligible. In all, the regional affiliations of the newspaper owners affected their framing of the security situation. This study is similar to the current study in that it studied an aspect of insecurity in Nigeria. It differs from the current study which focused on online versions of newspapers while Ngwu et al., (2015) worked with hard copy versions of newspapers. Also, ownership was considered based on just ethnic affiliations in Ngwu et al., (2015) while the present study also factored in the partisan variable of ownership.

In yet another study of influence of ownership on the framing of insecurity, Nwabueze and Ezebuenyi (2019) conducted a research entitled “Newspaper Framing of Biafra Agitation under Buhari’s Administration and its Influence on Public Support for the Struggle”. The study compared how newspapers belonging to persons of Southern extraction and Nigerians of other ethnic orientations framed Biafra agitation and how the newspaper framing influenced public support for the agitation. The study was guided by the following objectives: to find out whether differences exist between the patterns of news frames used by the pro-Igbo/pro-Biafra City newspapers and other national dailies in the coverage of the Biafra agitation under Buhari’s administration; to ascertain readers’ perception of the Biafra agitation under Buhari’s administration; and to examine whether news stories on Biafra agitation influenced public support for the struggle under Buhari’s administration. Anchored on the agenda setting theory, the study adopted content analysis and survey methods. The study found that Daily Sun and Biafra Times, which according to scholars are Pro-Igbo/Pro-Biafra City newspapers, used frames that emphasised deprivation, marginalisation and oppression of the Igbo people under Buhari’s administration and thus lent support to the Biafra agitation. This Day and The Guardian used frames that appear to denounce the Biafra agitation. The study concluded that newspaper framing of the Biafra agitation influenced support for the struggle. The study under review is related to the current study because it examined how ownership of newspapers influence framing of insecurity which is part of what the current study investigated. It differs from the current study because it analysed hard copy newspapers and did not study the partisan inclination of owners; the present study analysed online newspapers and factored in both the ethnic and political leanings of owners.

### **Research Design**

The study adopted a quantitative research design and used the content analysis method. This method was considered suitable due to the fact that content analysis uncovered frames, tones and agenda setting patterns in the coverage of insecurity during the 2023 election campaigns in Nigeria by five online newspapers and this aligns with the objectives of the study. The analysis was done using tables and simple percentages.

### **Population and Sample Size of the Study**

The population of the study comprised all stories on insecurity in two exclusively online newspapers (Sahara Reporters and Premium Times) and on the online versions of three newspapers that equally publish in hard copies (Daily Sun, Daily Trust, and The Nation). The five newspapers have widespread appeal and are read by both the elites and the rest of the populace. They were also chosen due to the peculiarities of their ownership and in line with the research questions which probed into how ethnic and political leanings of newspaper owners affected the framing of insecurity from September to December 2022.

The Nation newspaper belongs to Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the then flag bearer (and now the president) under the platform of the ruling party, the All Progressives Congress (APC); he is also of Yoruba extraction. The Nation was therefore chosen to gauge the framing patterns of a newspaper belonging to a member of the ruling party and a Yoruba. The Daily Sun belongs to Orji Uzor Kalu, a senatorial candidate of the ruling APC at the time of the study and who is of the Igbo tribe. His newspaper, the Daily Sun, was selected to uncover the framing patterns of a newspaper belonging to a member of the ruling party and of the Igbo tribe. Kalu's Igbo ethnic area is bedeviled by insecurity from Biafra separatists. The Daily Trust belongs to Kabiru Yussuf, who was not a card carrying member of any political party in Nigeria and is of Hausa-Fulani extraction. His newspaper was selected to find out the framing patterns of a newspaper owned by an entity without political party affiliation and person of Hausa-Fulani extraction; the Hausa-Fulani axis of Nigeria has been witnessing appreciable insecurity from the Boko Haram sect. Sahara Reporters belongs to Omoyele Sowore, the presidential flag bearer of the African Action Congress (AAC) in the 2023 elections and he is of Yoruba origin. A content analysis of his Sahara Reporters is aimed at uncovering framing patterns by a newspaper belonging to a member of an opposition party, a Yoruba from an area with some level of insecurity arising from environmental degradation. Premium Times belongs to Oyedapo Olorunyomi, a journalist, activist and an entity who is not a card carrying member of any political party; he is of Yoruba extraction. His newspaper, Premium Times, showed the framing patterns of a media organisation whose owner has no political party affiliation, is a Yoruba with a history of political activism and also share ethnic roots with Tinubu, the presidential flag bearer of the ruling party (and now the president).

The stories were sourced using search engines and with search words and phrases such as "Insecurity", "Kidnapping", "Insurgency", "Bandits", "Boko Haram", "IPOB/ESN", and "Fulani herdsmen". The search yielded stories on insecurity published on the online platforms of the five Nigerian newspapers. Ten stories were then randomly-selected per month from each newspaper for the months of September, October, November, and December 2022. That came to a total of 200 stories.

### **Content Categories**

Unit of Analysis: This included straight news stories, features, editorials, opinion articles, columns. To qualify, the item must have any of the words or phrases such as "insecurity", "Insurgency", "Bandits", "Boko Haram", "IPOB/ESN", "Fulani herdsmen", in the headline or body of the story.

**Frames:** The frames deployed in analysing the stories were:

**Hopelessness Frame:** Words or phrases suggesting that the government, its agencies, armed forces and other partners are incapable of solving the insecurity problem.

**Political Frame:** Words or group of words emphasising that the prevailing insecurity was meant to score political points or destabilise the government ahead of the 2023 elections.

**Religious Frame:** This refers to reports that suggest that the state of insecurity has religious undertones and is a tool of depopulating and destabilising people of certain religious leanings.

**Ethnic Frame:** This has to do with words suggesting ethnic coloration and motivation in the patterns of attacks.

**Conspiracy Frame:** This has to do with the belief that insecurity is a conspiracy by certain forces to show that the ruling party is incompetent and also a conspiracy of the Muslim north to wipe out the Christians south.

**Economic:** This refers to reports that talk about the implication of insecurity on the economy.

**Containment Effort:** This frame occurs when the story is about efforts by the government to stop insecurity.

**Tones:** Pro-government, anti-government, neutral

**Depth:** The depths of the stories were divided into three comprising 1-5 paragraphs, 6-10 paragraphs, 11 and above

*Sources quoted: Government officials, security agents, insurgents' spokesmen, politicians, community leaders, others.*

### Analysis of Data

A total of 200 items were analysed with 40 randomly selected from each online version of the five newspapers. The stories were analysed for frames, tones, voices (sources), and journalistic genre (story types). In the analysis, Daily Sun is depicted as DS; Daily Trust is DT; The Nation is TN; Premium Times is PT while Sahara Reporters is SR

Types of Stories on insecurity during the 2023 election campaigns

**Table 1: Types of Stories on insecurity during the 2023 election campaigns**

Story Types	DS(%)	DT(%)	TN(%)	PT(%)	SR (%)	Total (%)
News	33(82.5)	29(72.5)	25(62.5)	33(82.5)	38(95.0)	158(79.0)
Features	1(2.5)	4(10.0)	7(17.5)	1(2.5)	1(2.5)	14(7.0)
Opinion	0(0)	1(2.5)	8(20.0)	3(7.5)	1(2.5)	13(6.5)
Editorial	4(10.0)	4(10.0)	0(0)	3(7.5)	0(0)	11(5.5)
Columns	2(5.0)	2(5.0)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	4(2.0)
Total	40(100)	40(100)	40(100)	40(100)	40(100)	200(100)

*Source: Coding 2022*

From Table 1 above, the dominant journalism genre is straight news stories with Features and Opinions taking distant second and third places, respectively. The Nation led in the aspect of featuring other than straight news stories. It had the bulk of Features and Opinions coded and these two genres can provide opportunities for deep framing of situations by a newspaper. The Daily Sun and the Daily Trust led in another genre, editorials, that can also lend itself to extensive framing.

News sources of stories on insecurity during the 2023 election campaigns

**Table 2: News sources of stories on insecurity during the 2023 election campaigns**

Sources	DS(%)	DT(%)	TN(%)	PT(%)	SR(%)	Total(%)
Government Official	8(20.0)	8(20.0)	4(10.0)	10(25.0)	3(7.5)	33(16.5)
Security Agents	7(17.5)	12(30.0)	10(25.0)	11(27.5)	7(17.5)	47(23.5)
Insurgents' Spokesmen	4(10.0)	3(7.5)	0(0)	0(0)	7(17.5)	14(7.0)
Politicians	2(5.0)	6(15.0)	3(7.5)	0(0)	5(12.5)	16(8.0)
Community Leaders	7(17.5)	7(17.5)	11(27.5)	4(10.0)	7(17.5)	36(18.0)
Others	12(30.0)	4(10.0)	12(30.0)	15(37.5)	11(27.5)	54(27.0)
Total	40(100)	40(100)	40(100)	40(100)	40(100)	200(100)

*Source: Coding 2022*

In Table 2 above, the loudest voices belong to the 'others', 'security agents', and 'community leaders'. 'Others' include unnamed sources, and in Nigerian parlance, unnamed sources could be used to add voices serving the

interests of the newspaper. A preponderance of voices belonging to spokesmen of insurgents and often aggrieved community leaders in areas suffering attacks may signify a possible anti-government sentiment on the part of newspaper organisations. On the other hand, when dominant voices are those of government officials, and security agents, there may be higher opportunities of stories turning out pro-government.

Table 2 shows extensive voices of unnamed sources in all but the Daily Trust. The same Daily Trust and Premium Times also featured most of the ‘official’ voices of security agents and government officials. Sahara Reporters featured the least in the voices of government officials, made the most use of quotes and voices of insurgents’ spokesmen with the dominant voice as “others”. These features depict a stance against the government and a framing tallying with the owner’s position as a member of an opposition party. The Daily Sun, whose owner is a member of the ruling party and hails from the insecure south east, chose voices that balanced party and ethnic group loyalty. The newspaper had 37.5% content with the pro-government voices (government officials, 20%; Security Agents, 17.5%) and had 17.5% anti-government voices (Community Leaders, 17.5%). The Nation, published by a ruling party member, gave zero voice to spokesmen of insurgent groups, which is a significant occurrence because insurgents are anti-government elements. It also balanced partisan and ethnic loyalties by having 35% pro-government voices (government officials, 10%; Security Agents, 25%) while allotting 27.5% of voices to community leaders. Premium Times gave zero voice to spokesmen of insurgent groups had 52.5% pro-government voices (government officials, 25%; security agents, 27.5%) and 10% of voices to community leaders. The publisher does not belong to any political party but hails from the same zone with the candidate of the ruling party.

Frames of stories on insecurity during the 2023 election campaigns

**Table 3: Frames of stories on insecurity during the 2023 election campaigns**

<b>Sources</b>	<b>DS(%)</b>	<b>DT(%)</b>	<b>TN(%)</b>	<b>PT(%)</b>	<b>SR(%)</b>	<b>Total(%)</b>
Political	4(10.0)	7(17.5)	7(17.5)	11(27.5)	11(27.5)	40(20.0)
Ethnic	2(5.0)	5(12.5)	2(5.0)	1(2.5)	9(22.5)	19(9.5)
Religious	0(0)	4(10.0)	1(2.5)	1(2.5)	2(5.0)	8(4.0)
Hopelessness	10(25.0)	3(7.5)	13(32.5)	8(20.0)	10(25.0)	44(22.0)
Economic	1(2.5)	4(10.0)	0(0)	6(15.0)	3(7.5)	14(7.0)
Conspiracy	3(7.5)	5(12.5)	0(0)	5(12.5)	4(10.0)	17(8.5)
Containment Efforts	20(50.0)	12(30.0)	17(42.5)	8(20.0)	1(2.5)	58(29.0)
Total	40(100)	40(100)	40(100)	40(100)	40(100)	200(100)

*Source: Coding 2022*

From Table 3, it can be seen that, perhaps, the most glaring skewing was evident in the dominant frames of stories selected and edited for publication by the newspapers. The two newspapers (Daily Sun and The Nation) owned by politicians from the ruling party featured most stories with containment frames. These stories basically were about the efforts being made to curb insecurity and successes recorded through the efforts of the security agents and the federal government. The newspaper belonging to an opposition party presidential candidate (Sahara Reporters) featured only one story with a containment frame. However, The Nation also led with the hopelessness frame, which contrasts with the containment frame. That may be as a result of efforts to frame to take care of ethnic interests as the Yoruba Nation, an insurgent and separatist group, is becoming a problem in the south west, the homeland of Ahmed Bola Tinubu, owner of The Nation and presidential flag bearer of the ruling APC. The Daily Sun led with the containment frame at 50% but also had 25% of stories with the hopelessness frame. That shows a possible balancing of loyalties and frames as a member of the ruling party and an indigene of the south east Nigeria, which is currently witnessing much insecurity from two separatist groups, the Indigenous People of Biafra and the Eastern Security Network.



Tone of stories on insecurity during the 2023 election campaigns

**Table 4: Tone of stories on insecurity during the 2023 election campaigns**

Sources	DS(%)	DT(%)	TN(%)	PT(%)	SR(%)	Total(%)
Pro-Government	16(40.0)	12(30.0)	12(30.0)	15(37.5)	5(12.5)	60(30.0)
Anti-Government	18(45.0)	18(45.0)	8(20.0)	12(30.0)	23(57.5)	79(39.5)
Neutral	6(15.0)	10(25.0)	20(50.0)	13(32.5)	12(30.0)	61(30.5)
Total	40(100)	40(100)	40(100)	40(100)	40(100)	200(100)

Source: Coding 2022

Table 4 above shows that 57.5% of stories featured by Sahara Reporters, a newspaper belonging to an opposition party presidential aspirant, were anti-government. Only five out of 40 stories by Sahara Reporters showed a pro-government narrative. The Daily Sun, owned by a senatorial candidate (now re-elected) under the ruling party, who also hails from the south east had near equal pro-government and anti-government stories. This might be an effort to show support for the ruling party by highlighting containment efforts (which was apparent in Table 3) while also showing solidarity to the people of his south east ethnic group being ravaged by insecurity. The Nation, whose owner is the ruling party’s presidential flag bearer, had a total of 80% of all stories as either pro-government or neutral in an apparent show of support for his party. The Daily Trust belongs to Kabiru Yusuf, who is not a card carrying member of any political party but hails from northern Nigeria, a part of the country that has witnessed insecurity from the Boko Haram terrorist group. It featured 45% of stories with anti-government rhetoric. Another newspaper, Premium Times, whose owner is not a card carrying member of any political party, and who hails from the south west of Nigeria, and regarded as an activist, showed no clear framing. It is easy to deduce from the dominant tones that newspapers belonging to individuals in active partisan positions clearly tried to protect their political parties’ interests. They also framed to show support when their regions are facing situations of insecurity.

**Discussion of Findings**

The researchers sought to find out dominant frames used and uncover whether the political partisanship and ethnic orientation of five newspaper owners affected the framing of stories on insecurity during the 2023 election campaigns in Nigeria. From the analyses of data, the five newspapers carried out different levels of framing with the three owned by card carrying members of political parties skewing stories in a more glaring manner. Framing was mainly carried out through the dominant voices in stories, frames of reference and the tone of the stories. Sahara Reporters, which belongs to the presidential flag bearer of an opposition party, framed by giving the loudest voice to insurgents’ spokesmen out of the five newspapers, allotting a very low voice to government officials and emphasising the quotes and voices of unnamed sources, often carefully selected to serve the interests of newspaper owners. Sahara Reporters also framed by using 57% of stories with anti-government tones, mainly hopelessness frames, and nearly did not use a story emphasising containment efforts of the government.

The Nation, owned by the presidential flag bearer of the ruling party, framed by raising the voices of pro-government elements and shutting up insurgents’ voices while also giving a loud voice to community leaders to demonstrate loyalty to his ethnic roots. The newspaper also framed by balancing hopelessness frame with containment efforts to protect both partisan and ethnic interests while using a lot of stories with either pro-government or neutral tones. The Daily Sun, which belongs to a re-elected senator under the ruling party, toed almost the same path with The Nation in skewing stories to fit narratives that will protect the interest of both the government and the ethnic homeland.

The two newspapers whose owners were not members of a political party were not regular in their pattern of framing. The Daily Trust, despite the north being almost over run by terrorists and bandits, emphasised the containment efforts frame; it gave the loudest voices to pro-government elements and used stories with 45%

anti-government tones. Perhaps, the only deduction from the analyses is that the newspaper made efforts to maintain loyalty to the ruling party headed by a northerner. Premium Times also showed a similar pattern by giving more than half of the voices to pro-government elements and led with pro-government tones; this could be because the presidential flag bearer of the ruling party in the 2023 elections is from the same ethnic group with the publisher.

The findings of this work, especially in the area of framing news and issues to take care of the interests of media owners, correspond in varying degrees to previous research efforts on influence of ownership on framing insecurity reportage. Some of these studies include those by Ojebuyi and Ekennia (2013); Demarest, Godefroidt and Langer (2020); Dunu and Okafor (2017); Ngwu, Ekwe and Chiaha (2015); and Nwabueze and Ezebuenyi (2019). It also corresponds with findings on other studies on influence of ownership on reportage in cases other than insecurity. Such other studies are by Simiyu (2013); Simiyu (2014); and Wang (2003). It equally corresponds with the basic assumptions of the Frames theory of Goffman (1986); Media Ownership Theory of Shoemaker and Reese (1991); as well as the Propaganda Model of Chomsky and Herman (2002). The impact of ownership on framing conflicts and other issues are so well recognised that Watson and Hill, (2016) now put it that the watch dog has now turned to a lap dog.

### **Conclusion**

The study answered all the three research questions on framing of insecurity in five online newspapers during the 2023 elections in Nigeria. The major findings were that there was framing of stories on insecurity to suit the partisan and ethnic orientation of newspaper owners, especially owners that are card carrying members of political parties in Nigeria. The dominant frames in that order are the containment efforts, hopelessness and political frames.

### **Recommendations**

In the light of the findings and conclusions arrived at in this study, the researchers recommend that:

1. Nigeria's newspaper ownership laws be reviewed to outlaw ownership of newspapers by individuals or groups that are active, card-carrying members of political parties in the country.
2. Newspaper owners, managers and journalism unions emphasise re-training of journalists so as to further promote objectivity and mitigate the easily perceivable effects of media capture due to ownership.
3. Framing should be a major subject of study in journalism training institutions since it is the main feature of the fifth and present era in journalism.

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