

## Analysis of Nigerian Newspaper Coverage of 2015 Gubernatorial Election in Kogi State, Nigeria.

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### ABSTRACT

Analysis of newspapers coverage of the 2015 Kogi governorship election is a study that exposed Nigerian newspapers attention to the political imbroglio that happened in the state following the death of Prince Audu Abubakar of APC at the middle of the election. The study examined whether the newspapers prominently and frequently covered the situation in Kogi as part of their efforts towards exposing the political upheaval in the state. The study also examined the dominant source of stories to the newspapers on the situation. The study adopted the content analysis research methods in studying 162 editions of Daily sun, This-Day and Punch newspapers within the months of October to December, 2015. The study which adopted the Agenda-Setting and Social Responsibility theories as its theoretical framework found that the newspapers prominently and frequently covered the situation in Kogi while the ethnic source dominated the sources of news stories on the 2015 Kogi governorship election. It was concluded that ethno-religious sentiment have influenced the Nigerian political environment to the extent that citizens have less concern to the provisions of the constitutions but much on ethnic origin of a would be leader. The study among other recommended that the press should strive to ensure that issues of political and legal concerns are refrained from being viewed from ethno-religious perspectives.

Keywords: Election, Kogi state 2015, Audu Abubakar, Nigerian newspapers

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### INTRODUCTION

The death of Abubakar Audu, the gubernatorial candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC), in the middle of the inconclusive first round of the 2015 gubernatorial election in Kogi state left heavy political and constitutional questions on how the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) will un-tie the political Gordian knot in the State [1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6]. The death of Audu in the middle of the inconclusive election is a landmark event in the political history of Nigeria because the country has not witnessed a situation of this nature since the return to democratic system of government in 1999 [7, 8, 9, 10]. For this reason, the Kogi gubernatorial election of 2015 has introduced a new dimension into the Nigerian political system. This oddity in Kogi state made the gubernatorial election both an issue of intense media attention and a landmark history in the Nigeria political system. Oddity is newsworthy

[11], and this accounts for the reason why the media went awash with the story [12]. In a situation like what happened in Kogi State, people look to the media for reliable information and clarification of issues especially in an extra-ordinary matter that has no precedence and may not have been foreseen and captured by extant electoral laws [13]. [14], supports this assertion by stating that the media generally create and nurture healthy and comfortable democratic processes all over the world. This is because they disseminate 'valid' interminable information that serves as a backbone to the system [15]. The import of this is that the Kogi 2015 gubernatorial election deserves valid interminable media information which will contextualise it and provide a sound reference point with which to handle a future occurrence. With this, the duty of the media as the Fourth Estate of the Realm [16] saddled with the responsibility of protecting the country's democracy, is clearly defined. The media

needed to deploy the unbiased umpire role of clearly dissecting the event, putting it in perspective and providing information on the way forward while protecting the democratic process. It is in line with this that [17] maintain that “the media remain a cardinal institution for consolidating and extending Nigeria’s democracy; in view of their oversight function with respect to the three arms of government as well as their own ranks”. Here it can be seen that working towards accommodating the Kogi incident will further consolidate the country’s democracy [18].

The upheaval created by the 2015 Kogi State election incident attracted the attention of the all the three arms of government and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) with the media at the centre to keep records of and

report to the public what those at the helm of affairs are doing about the peculiar circumstance [19, 20, 21, 22]. The media had the major aim of creating awareness and appreciable involvement of the citizens in the entire democratic process [23, 24, 25, 26] and this achievement, no doubt is shared between the media and other democratic institutions that engage in political education and mobilization [27, 28, 29 30]. Therefore, the resolution of this new political trend that has evolved in Kogi state towards protecting the then 17-year old Nigerian democracy cannot be better achieved without the active involvement of the media. This assertion gains credence from [31] who maintained that it is impossible to have a democratic society without an efficient mass media system [32, 33, 34].

### Objectives of the Study

This study was based on the following research objectives as the benchmark for focus to be achieved:

1. To ascertain if newspapers give prominence coverage to the 2015 Kogi gubernatorial election.
4. Nigerian media
2. To ascertain the frequency of coverage given to the 2015 Kogi gubernatorial election by the Nigerian media.
3. To ascertain the source of media coverage given to the 2015 Kogi gubernatorial election by the

### Research Questions

1. Did Nigerian newspaper give prominence to the 2015 Kogi gubernatorial election?
2. What was the frequency of coverage given to the 2015 Kogi gubernatorial election by the Nigerian media?
3. What was the source of media coverage given to the 2015 Kogi gubernatorial election by the Nigerian media?

### Scope and Limitation of the study

This research is limited to only to the print media, precisely the three selected national dailies, the *Daily Sun*, *This day and Punch* newspapers published within the period of the 2015 Kogi gubernatorial election. Within the period of study, the researcher was faced with the difficulties of going through the pages of the select newspapers for the select months under study. The researchers were also faced with the challenges of poor library record

keeping which made some of the required newspapers or their pages unavailable for assessment. The attitudes of some newspaper store keepers also caused unnecessary delays in the completion of this research work. Moreover, considering the large number of newspapers in the country, three newspapers may not be said to totally justify, the frequency, source, genre and prominence given to the Kogi controversial gubernatorial

election by the Nigerian media. All these limitations above did not alter the objectivity of this study as the

researchers were able to surmount them through rigorous and concerted efforts to complete the study.

**Significance of the Study**

The outcome of this research will be of immense benefit not only to the government but to the entire nation at large. The success or failure of any nation lies in the hands of the media [35]. Against this postulation, this study evaluates the level of success by the media in promoting democratic ideals by providing prompt, reliable and useful

information to the masses and policy makers. The study also rate the media’s zeal to work for the political development and democratic security of the country’s electoral system through effective media coverage of electoral frauds and oddities as found in the 2015 Kogi gubernatorial election.

**Methodology**

This study was conducted using the content analysis research method which, according to [36], analyses the manifest content of communication to tackle the problem of a study. The researchers therefore analysed the manifest content

of the select Nigerian newspapers that constitute the sample of the study. These newspapers’ contents regarding the 2015 Kogi State gubernatorial election and the death of Prince Abubakar Audu of APC were carefully examined and analysed.

**Population of the Study**

Three national dailies; the *Daily Sun*, *This-Day*, and *Punch* newspapers were selected for this study from the team of registered newspapers in Nigeria. The rationale for the choice of these newspapers was their wide circulation, readership, regional base and the researcher’s discretion. The population of the newspapers studied is:  
 October 2015            31 copies

November 2015        30 copies  
 December 2015       30 copies  
 This makes a total of 91 editions each of the three selected newspapers. This means that the population of this study is 273 editions published within the period of the study, which is October 1, 2015 to December 30, 2015.

**Sample and Sampling Technique**

Since not all the editions of the newspapers contained information on the 2015 Kogi state governorship election, the researchers adopted the purposive sampling technique which allows them to purposively select the editions of the three newspapers that meet the inclusive

criterion for the contents under investigation. The selection was based on an expected quality, and or character (Nwodu, 2006). Using Taro Yamane’s formula of sample size determination thus:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n= sample size

N= total population

e = error margin error (0.05)<sup>2</sup>

1= constant

$$n = \frac{273}{1+273(0.05)^2}$$

However, to make room for uniform distribution, the sample size of 162.5 was

approximated to 162. This means subtraction of half a day to the total

sample size. The need for a uniform distribution of the sample, justifies this subtraction by half, which the researchers noted is not significant and does not affect the representativeness of the sample size. It is usually not the largeness of the sample size that makes a sample valid but its representativeness [37, 38, 39, 40] note that, a sample is representative of the population from

#### Unit of Analysis

This is means defining the content units of communication which the researchers are interested in studying. These units of analysis therefore, constitute the yardstick for analyzing the manifest content of the selected newspapers. This study therefore, was based on the

#### Content Categories

These are categories of contents which the researchers used in the study. The reason for categorizing content of communication is to ensure clarity and distinction [41]. The categories in this work are the story placements: the front page, inside page and back page stories. Those stories placed in the front pages are regarded extremely prominent, those at the back are regarded as very prominent and the ones in inside page-lead stories are classified as prominent whereas those inside page stories are regarded as not prominent. The frequency was measured by the number of news stories published per newspaper edition

which it is taken if the characteristics of the sample mimic those of the population. This brought the total sample size to n=162. To ensure that each of the selected papers for the study had equal numbers of representation, the quota sampling technique was used to assign 54 editions to each of the selected newspapers.

following units to analyse media coverage of the 2015 Kogi gubernatorial election and the death of Prince Audu of APC. The units of analysis are: The months, the newspapers, the prominence, frequency and story sources.

on the 2015 Kogi governorship election within the months understudy. The sources were classified as legal, religious, political and ethnic sources. Sources that are from the legal practitioners are regarded as legal; sources while those from the clergy men are regarded as the religious contents. The same way the researchers regarded as political; source all contents that came from either PDP or APC in support of their candidates in the election while ethnic sources are those voices that the shows the ethnic divide in the state between the Ijaw, Egbira, Okun, Igala and other tribes in Kogi state.

#### Method and Instrument of Data Collection

In respect to the research design adopted in this study, the most appropriate instrument for the collection of data is the coding system. Therefore, the manifest content of the selected newspapers were coded using coding sheet carefully constructed for this research. One major advantage of coding over all other means of data collection is its ability to translate field data into an easily understandable value or symbols representing specific attributes or given variables and indication [42]. The following instrument was used in the cause of generating data for this research.

1. **Coding Guide:** this is well designed sheet bearing all the units of analysis, the content

category and their various code numbers with which they will be identified in the study.

2. **Coding Sheet:** this is a sheet of paper that helps the researchers in assigning numbers and codes to the content categories and unit of analysis in content analysis research method. The researchers used the coding sheet for gathering information on the news coverage of the 2015 Kogi gubernatorial election and the death of Prince Abubakar Audu of APC and also the coding guide as an instructional or training/resource material for the coders.

**Inter Coder Reliability**

Inter-coder reliability was assessed using Holsti's inter-coder reliability formula.

$$R = \frac{2(M)}{N1+N2}$$

Where:

M= the number of coding decisions which two coders agree.

N1 & N2= the number of coding decisions by the first and second coder respectively.

Therefore Inter-coder reliability

$$R = \frac{2(12)}{15+15} = \frac{24}{30} = 0.80$$

The Holsti's inter-coder reliability test was calculated thus:

Reliability

**Data Analysis and Presentation**

All data generated in this work were analysed using both descriptive analysis. Frequency tables and percentages were used at the descriptive level to analyse the response categories observed in the field work. In this segment, data generated using coding sheet were presented in line with research questions. In this regards, values of information obtained from the news stories, features,

opinion/columns, interviews, cartoons, editorials, letters and pictures were considered in respect to dominance, sources, frequency and positioning of contents and the nature of coverage as well as the direction of the stories used by the media in the coverage of this 2015 Kogi governorship election categorized according to its research objectives.

**Answer to research question one**

Table 1: Prominence coverage of the 2015 Kogi Gubernatorial election

Variables	Daily sun	This Day	Punch	Total freq	%
Front page	14	9	12	35	15%
Inside page	49	46	62	157	67%
Back page	18	11	13	42	18%
<b>Total</b>	81(35%)	66(28%)	87(37%)	234	100%

Source: Researchers' content analysis, 2020. The implication of the above data is that all the selected newspapers gave prominent coverage to the 2015 Kogi

gubernatorial election by contributing to constitutional and political development of the country.

Table 2: Frequency of coverage of the 2015 Kogi gubernatorial election

Variables	Daily Sun	This Day	Punch	Total freq	%
1-2 times	25	22	26	73	31%
3-4 times	44	25	41	110	47%
5-6 times	8	15	14	37	16%
7-8 times	4	4	6	14	6%
<b>Total</b>	81(35%)	66(28%)	87(37%)	234	100%

Source: researcher's content analysis, 2020.

Data from table 2 shows that the election enjoyed frequency publication at 3-4 times per newspaper. This shows how important the media considered the

election and the surrounding incidence that makes it a landmark history in Nigeria political environment.

Table 3: Source of media coverage to the 2015 Kogi gubernatorial election by the Nigerian media

Variables	Daily Sun	This Day	Punch	Freq	%
Religious source	21	16	24	61	26%
Ethnic source	28	22	19	69	29%
Legal source	15	13	20	48	20.5%
Political source	17	15	24	56	23.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>81(35%)</b>	<b>66(28%)</b>	<b>87(37%)</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: researcher's content analysis, 2020.

Table 3 revealed that the ethnic source of news stories dominated the news reports from the three newspapers under investigation taking top of the table with a total of 69 items or 29% of the total items published in the period understudy. This implies that the ethnicity plays significant role in determination of the political situation in Kogi state. Another significant revelation from this data in table 3 is the position of legal sources of the news stories. Being a legal matter, legal sources of news is ordinarily

#### Discussion of Findings

Considering the first research question which sought to ascertain if the media gave prominence to their coverage of the 2015 Kogi governorship election, it was found that though greater percent of the publications were buried inside the pages, the media accorded prominence to the election given that drove the country into legal imbroglio and created room for expression of ethno-religious views. Data from table one shows that front and back page stories controlled 33% of the total publication with reasonable spread from all the newspapers. Publishing this election matter in the focal points of the newspapers paved a way for them to be read by many Nigerians. It is also pertinent to state that the nature of the election crisis as the first in history in Nigeria's political development makes the reports to attract media attention. This finding agrees with the position of the media power of setting agenda for public discussion. This collaborates the position held in [42] that the media draw public attention to issues and events by publishing such issues and events in their focal points. Moreover, the finding equally lends credence to the position of the proponents of the agenda setting

expected to be the major source of stories but it secured only 48 items or 20% of the total items published. With legal source of news coming last in the table where ethnic and religious sources came first and second, the table shows the powerful nature of ethno-religious sentiment in Nigerian political games. It is imperative to state that the sources of the news dictate the direction or slant of the news contents which in turn guide the perception of the public news consumers.

theory which according to [43], cited in [44] states that the media lead the public in assigning relative importance to various public issues by positioning them in focal points for public to see. It is the believe of the proponents of the Agenda-Setting theory that through placement of stories in the various focal points of newspapers, the level of importance it commands in the media will be reiterated among viewers who in turn discuss such events with friends and peers after being exposed to those contents. The use of focal points in the coverage of the 2015 political Gordian nut in Kogi state makes the political landmark history a matter of public concern among Nigerians.

On the second research question which examined whether the newspapers gave adequate coverage to the 2015 Kogi governorship election, the data in table two revealed that the newspapers gave adequate coverage to the election. This finding is in tandem with the position of social responsibility theory of mass communication which places the media on the responsibility of informing the public on happenings around them. Publishing a total of 234 items on the

Kogi Elections within three months and an average of 3-4 stories per newspaper makes the researchers to conclude that the media gave adequate attention and coverage to the issues concerning the election. This finding agrees with the agenda setting theory which maintained that through repeated publication of events in the news, the people will be forced to see how important such an event was attached in the media [45]. The majority of the stories were published by *Punch* newspaper which came first with a total of 87 items on the election. The lead maintained by *Punch* may not be dissociated from the fact that it was a Yoruba based newspaper coupled with the involvement of the Yoruba ethnic group in the 2015 Kogi governorship crisis [46].

On the third research question which sought to ascertain the dominant sources of news coverage of the 2015 governorship election in Kogi state, it was found that media coverage of the election crisis was dominated by ethnic sources and religious source which controlled the highest and second highest items published among the three newspapers under investigation (see, table 3 for more). As those from Egbira ethnic group in Kogi jubilate over the APC's decision to adopt Yahaya as their first son to ascend the seat as governor of the state, the Okun ethnic group on the other side are pressuring hard on the APC party to replace Alhaji Audu with Falake [47, 48, 49, 50]. It is imperative to state that the choice of Alhaji Yaya Bello by the party against James Faleke was religiously based. This finding shows the true political situation in Nigeria political activities which usually follow the ethno-religious angle at all time. It agrees with the views in [51] that Nigeria tilt towards

ethnicity, politics by identity and religious cleavages when it comes to political positions. Looking at the situation in Kogi state, the people are not interested in the personality of the candidate, rather let the governor be from their ethnic group [53,54].

The Kogi 2015 governorship typified the true situation in Nigeria where only the Hausa-Fulanis and the Yoruba people are at the helm of affairs without any recourse to allow others taste the seat of power. The situation lends the country to the eruption of various ethnic-minded groups seeking to force the government to address their ethnic interest. Kogi is a state with tribal and religious differences known for leadership crises built on claims and counter claims of marginalization. The data support the claims made in [55] who argues that majority of Nigerians welcomed and adopted these two imported religions (Islam and Christianity) as their faith and use same for the actualization of the personal gains and interest which finally placed Nigerians at war(s) against themselves. Instead of exposing the people to the legal and political implications of the death of the leading governorship candidate in the election, the newspapers joined the bandwagon of dancing to the tune of ethno-religious views through interviewing people with ethnic and religious sentiments rather than the legal luminaries for legal interpretation of the constitution on the election. The finding also justifies the symbiotic relationship between ethno-religious origins of people and their political desires in the country [56] which according to [57] makes ethno-religious background the most powerful instrument of politics in Nigeria.

### Conclusion

Drawing from the data generated in the field study, the researchers conclude that the 2015 Kogi governorship election was given both prominent and adequate coverage by the three newspapers studied within the period of study. The

researchers also conclude that Nigerian media is still guilty of twisting issues from what it was to what they want it to be through their choice of sources of news which in this study was observed to determine the direction of news contents.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings in the study, the researchers recommended as follows:

1. That more efforts should be put in place by the media to give prominent coverage to all other matters of national concern as done to the 2015 Kogi governorship election.
2. That the media shouldn't relent in frequently publishing events that can lead to exposing the people to lacunas in the constitution. From the media contents examined, it

was very clear that the Nigerian constitution was not clear on the death of a candidate while election is ongoing.

3. That the media should as serious matter of concern allow issues to follow their normal channels by encouraging the interviews of resources persons rather than covering every issue from ethno-religious views.

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