

## Coverage of the National Assembly Crises in the Nigeria's Fourth Republic by Select Mainstream Newspapers

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### **Abstract**

The study was conducted to determine the coverage given to various crises that occurred in the National Assembly of Nigeria from 1999 to 2016 by *The Guardian*, *The Punch* and *Vanguard* newspapers. Content analysis was adopted while coding sheet was used as the instrument of data collection. Results showed that the select newspapers published 1,740 news articles on National Assembly crises from 1999 to 2016. Findings indicated that most of the news stories on the National Assembly crises were written in double columns (62.1%), multiple columns accounted for 32.4%, while single column was employed in disseminating 5.5 % of the crises stories. The main crises that rocked the National Assembly were financial corruption (40.3%), leadership tussle (12.3%), bribery (10.5%), forgery accounted for 9.6%, budget padding (8.5%) and impeachment of National Assembly leaders (8.7%). Results of the Chi Square tests on the null hypotheses showed that there is statistically a significant difference between the newspapers and the types of crisis reported as  $p < 0.05$ . This means that the P value for types of crisis is significant to prediction on press reportage of the various National Assembly various. Therefore, it was concluded that as a result of the importance or danger which the crises rocking the National Assembly posed to the continued survival of democracy in Nigeria, the select newspapers gave the various crises attention with reasonable coverage.

**Keywords:** Crisis, Democracy, Fourth Republic, Reportage, National Assembly

### **Introduction**

The press does not only serve as a watchdog, but guides the government towards change. Information is the basis for effecting change as well as tackling the consequences of change. The information needed to run an open and successful government is to a large extent, provided by the press. The information-dissemination role of the press is a veritable tool for change. Human history is replete with evidences that the press has always been spearheading socio-political, spiritual and economic changes (Olaiya, Apeloko & Ayeni, 2013). From the foregoing, it is not an overstatement to stress that the press has an enormous role to play in the activities of every nation. The civilian regime of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo during the Fourth Republic spanned from 1999 to 2007. It was a mixed period of peace and crises imbued with political and religious intrigues. The zoning policy of his party, Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), was adhered to by the leadership of the party. During the stated period, the top four positions in the country- the President, the Vice President, Senate President and Speaker of the House were zoned to the South-West, North-East, South-East and North-West, respectively. At the end of

Obasanjo's term in 2007 and the return of the country's leadership to the North, the ruling PDP then reviewed its zoning policy without much argument. In 2007, Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'Adua from the North-West became the President of Nigeria while the South-South produced the Vice-President in the person of Goodluck Jonathan. Senator David Mark from the North-Central became the Senate President, while Hon. Patricia Etteh from the South-West was elected as the Speaker to succeed Hon. Aminu Bello Masari (*The Guardian*, May 30, 2015).

The press has an immense power in a democratic society like Nigeria because news consumers obtain news from the Press rather than from other sources of information. Press reportage shapes how people perceive the world and what they consider to be important. The press reportage of news serves as an intermediary between the government and the governed and this helps in determining which issues should be discussed and keeps people actively involved in society (Daramola, 2013). Daramola further notes that news reporting is a universal characteristic of both the print and electronic media. For an event to be newsworthy, it must meet certain criteria which are referred to as news determinants. The criteria include prominence, proximity, oddity, magnitude, personality, human interest, timeliness among others. The capacity to successfully manage crises is a fundamental element of good governance; it tests governments' capacity to provide the appropriate responses at the right time in order to protect their citizens, property and businesses and lessen the impact of disasters. Openness and adequate communication are vital for every democracy and a maximum of transparency of government actions is a prerequisite for government and its citizens' satisfactory bilateral contact.

The office of the Senate President is the third most important elective position in the country and as such, has always been a subject of interest among politicians and their political parties. Besides presiding over the Upper Chamber, the Senate President is the Chairman of the National Assembly and the head of the legislative arm of the Federal Government of Nigeria. Given this reality, power brokers have always regarded the occupation of that esteemed office as fundamental in the power balancing act. This is why the politics of who would always occupy the office becomes a major political concern in Nigeria. Whenever it is time to elect or impeach the Senate President, interest groups and political stakeholders would mount pressure on the powers-that-be to zone either the office of the Senate President or that of the Speaker of House of Representatives to them or their people. The Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) employed the zoning formula to determine who presided over the Legislature in the country from 1999 to May 29, 2015. The study, therefore, was interested in the content of the Press reportage of National Assembly crises from 1999 to 2016 by *The Guardian*, *The Punch* and *Vanguard* newspapers.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Democracy has been under trial in Nigerian since 1999. There have been reported series of crises in the National Assembly of Nigeria's fourth republic. Journalists have been accused by media critics of bias reportage. The practice of journalism entails journalists

relying on evidences, observations, victims and eyewitness accounts of events to produce reports. Journalism critics discussed recurring themes such as commercialisation, sensationalism, propaganda, advertising and ethics, including the consequences it could have on the quality of news disseminated to the public (Dabbous, 2010). Social critics have accused the Press of constituting itself into a court of law in monitoring trials of some public officers and passing their judgement before that of the court. The study, therefore, was motivated by the need to determine Press reportage of National Assembly crises from 1999 to 2016, with particular attention on *The Guardian*, *The Punch* and *Vanguard* newspapers.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions were designed to guide the study:

1. What was the depth of coverage given to the National Assembly crises by the select newspapers from 1999 to 2016?
2. What types of crises were reported by the select newspapers in the National Assembly from 1999 to 2016?

### **Hypothesis for the Study**

**Ho<sub>1</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the depth of coverage of various National Assembly crises by each of the newspapers.

**Ho<sub>2</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the types of crises reported by each of the newspapers.

### **Literature Review**

One sure way of keeping in touch with our contemporary world is through the media. Communication is a vital component of our lives and existence and no society has been known to exist without it. It is the exchange of ideas, views, information, experiences and the sharing of meanings between persons, nations, societies and cultures. This necessitates the continuous study in the area of mass communication and how it affects different societies and people (Tobechukwu, 2017). Newspapers are largely or seemingly understood to be synonymous with news stories. However, there exist several other types of newspapers' contents. In relation to the foregoing, newspapers are also seen as one of the most important mass media anywhere in the world. In Nigeria, the history and nature of newspapers are politically connected to Nigeria's colonial rule. One of the primary aims of newspapers is the provision of information (Abimbola, 2014).

The press can make or mar a nation. The press is capable of making or destroying governments given appropriate conditions: it can cause war, create conditions for peace. It can promote development or create difficulties in the way of development (Atim, 2010). Therefore, in relation to political crisis, the press as a vital organ of the society is supposed to perform its traditional functions of information, education and sensitisation of the citizens. During crisis situations, the press is supposed to act as a catalyst for conflict resolution and peace building. This is what some scholars refer to as advocacy and peace journalism. News story dominates the format employed by newspapers in

coverage of events in every society. However, there are other types of formats that come to bear in relation to topical issues. This includes editorials, letters-to-editor/text-to-the-editor, advertorials, pictorials, cartoons, features and commentaries. The type of coverage employed by any newspaper other than news may, therefore, imply that the opinions of the public or those of the newspaper are allowed to hold sway. Though it is sometimes difficult to ascertain objective or balance, there appears to be a common thinking that news are facts and not opinion. Other than news stories, every other content of a newspaper is considered either as the opinion of the public or that of the newspaper (Abimbola, 2014).

Conflicts in general are not new to human societies; they are as old as human society because they have been in existence in all spheres of human life since the beginning of history (Chiluwa, 2011). In most cases, during a crisis, social and economic activities are disrupted and the consequences, shape the future of the parties involved (Vasudev, 2002 cited in Chiluwa, 2011). Some conflicts were recorded in the political arena due to corruption among members of lawmakers or executive arm of government. The Fourth Senate of the Federal Republic of Nigeria was no doubt born into crises. The Upper House of the Nigerian National Parliament produced financial scandals as well as leadership crises as its major defining attribute of the National Assembly of Nigeria's Fourth Republic (Banjo, 2013).

President Obasanjo's alleged third term bid became public knowledge in the last quarter of 2005. As a result, President Obasanjo's government constituted the National Political Reform Conference. After a thorough debate on the constitutional amendment bill, the National Assembly, on May 16, 2006 rejected the agenda; thus, ending the third term ambition of the president as well as an amendment of other relevant clauses in the Constitution (Olurode, 2006).

On July 22, 1999, the first speaker of the House of Representatives was removed from office having confessed to certificate forgery and false declaration of age. On the 19th of November, 1999, Chief Evans Enwerem, the then Senate President was impeached and replaced with the late Dr. Chuba Okadigbo on the ground of incompetence. The latter was soon enmeshed in yet another political crisis, which led to his removal in less than six months. Significantly, in less than three years of democracy, the senate had three different presidents. Similar conflicts and threats were recurrent in the House of Representatives where members constantly accused one another of financial impropriety and corruption. In 2007 for instance, Nigeria's first female Speaker of the House of Representatives was replaced following a 'house renovation' scandal that engulfed the House for many weeks. The situation has remained unchanged, especially with the recurrent Niger Delta crises (Chiluwa, 2011).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study was anchored on agenda setting theory. This theory was propounded in 1972/1973 by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw. The centre-point of agenda-setting theory is that people have the right to think what they want to think, but the bulk of their discussion centre around what the media highlight as important (Anaeto, Onabajo & Osifeso, 2008). There is a relationship between public opinion and published opinion.

The importance attached to certain subjects by the press brings about a strong influence on the public opinion, on the relevance given to certain issues and the way news media audiences think about these issues.

The press reportage of crises in the National Assembly provides a distinctive case through which agenda-setting could be examined. Whenever there is crisis in the National Assembly, it is certain that parliamentarians, staff of National Assembly and political correspondents of news media organisations have firsthand knowledge of it. The public get to know through the publication of such conflicts in news media. This practice ostensibly provides the opportunity for the press to set the agenda for debates. The public play no role in the selection of news items for publication; therefore, limiting the overall public impact upon the debate that degenerate into crises in the National Assembly and potentially give way for the press to set or establish the debate's agenda. Against the background of the foregoing, the journalists wield enormous influence on the nature and character of information disseminated to the people. Operating as gatekeepers, the media through their reportage and analysis of contemporary political events and personalities define public perception concerning those events. Indeed, they set national political agenda as well as guiding public understanding of issues. The journalists exercise a great deal of influence on the nature and character of information disseminated to the public.

### **Methodology**

The researcher adopted content analysis method, while coding sheet was used as the instrument of data collection. The coding guide as an instrument is made up of content categories. The coding sheet was designed independently by the researcher in such a manner that all the variables needed with regard to the purpose of the study were recorded. Simple random sampling and thematic sampling methods were employed in this study. Simple random sampling technique was employed to select *The Guardian*, *The Punch* and *Vanguard* for the study. The selection of the aforementioned newspapers was anchored on the following criteria without consideration of their geographical base:

- a. The newspapers evaluated for this study are national newspapers and have national coverage. The newspapers could be seen at newsstands on daily basis across the country. The select newspapers had a circulation range of 100,000 - 500,000 copies per day (Brown & Udomisor, 2015).
- b. These newspapers had been in existence prior to 1999.
- c. The select newspapers have covered many national events including the National Assembly crises from 1999 to 2016.
- d. The select newspapers are dailies running from Sunday to Saturday and are still in existence.

The population of the study is 18,966 which are the total editions of *The Punch*, *The Guardian* and *Vanguard* from May 29, 1999 to December 2016. The sample size for the study is 290. This approach was taken due to the fact that there were years when no crisis was recorded in the National Assembly. This, therefore, occasioned the use of thematic approach to choose only the editions published when there were crises in the National Assembly. To facilitate easy analysis and interpretation of data, tabular, frequency and percent statistical techniques were employed in which data were distributed in simple

percentage which allows comparison of findings. ANOVA was used to test and analyse the hypotheses of the study. The following content categories were employed in this study: types of crisis and depth of coverage of various crises in the National Assembly. Unit of analysis coded under types of crises in this study are: impeachment, election, financial corruption, budget padding, leadership, bribery, forgery (document/certificate) and third-term agenda. Unit of analysis under depth of reportage for this study are: single column, double columns and multiple columns.

### Data Presentation/Analysis

**Table 1: The Depth of Reportage given to National Assembly Crises by the Select Newspapers from 1999-2016 (n=290)**

*Column	<i>The Guardian</i> (n=83)	<i>The Punch</i> (122)	<i>The Vanguard</i> (n=85)	Total(290)
Single	9(10.8)	25(20.5)	15(17.6)	49(16.9)
Double	24(28.9)	40(32.8)	24(28.2)	88(30.3)
Multiple	81(97.6)	116(95.1)	83(97.6)	280(96.6)

Field Survey,

Values in Parenthesis are percentages

\*=Multiple Responses

Results in table 1 reveal the depth of reportage given to National Assembly crises by the select newspapers from 1999-2016. Findings showed that *The Punch* had the highest single column (20.5%) and double column (32.8%) and this could be adduced to the highest number of *The Punch* newspaper sampled, while *The Guardian* and *Vanguard* had the Highest (97.6) multiple columns.

**Table 2: Type of Crises Reported by the Select Newspapers in National Assembly from 1999-2016 (n=290)**

*Crises	<i>The Guardian</i> (n=83)	<i>The Punch</i> (n=122)	<i>The Vanguard</i> (n=85)	Total(n=290)
Impeachment	58(69.8)	75(61.5)	66(77.6)	199(68.6)
Financial corruption	73(87.9)	108(88.5)	83(97.6)	264(91.0)
Leadership	79(95.2)	120(98.3)	85(100.0)	284(97.9)
Bribery	57(68.7)	106(86.9)	77(90.6)	240(82.8)
Forgery	46(55.4)	95(77.9)	79(92.9)	220(75.9)
Third Term	12(14.5)	26(21.3)	14(16.5)	52(17.9)
Election	40(48.2)	69(56.6)	68(80.0)	177(61.0)
Budget Padding	41(49.4)	85(69.7)	70(82.4)	196(67.6)

Values in parenthesis are percentages

\*=Multiple Responses

From table 2, findings showed that leadership (95.2%), financial corruption (87.9%), impeachment (69.8%), bribery (68.7%) and forgery (55.4%) were the major type of crises reported by *The Guardian* Newspaper while leadership crisis (98.3%), financial corruption (88.5%), bribery (86.9%) and forgery (77.9%) were the major type of crises

reported by *The Punch* from 1999-2016. Also, the major crises reported by *Vanguard* were: Leadership (100.0%), financial corruption (97.6%), forgery (92.9%) and bribery (90.6%) from 1999-2016. This infers that the major type of crises reported by the three selected newspaper from 1999-2016 were leadership, bribery and financial corruption.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The findings showed that *The Punch* had the highest single column (20.5%) and double column (32.8%) and this could be adduced to be the highest number of *The Punch* Newspaper sampled while *The Guardian* and *Vanguard* had the highest (97.6) multiple columns. Operating as gatekeepers, findings confirmed that the media through their reportage and analysis of contemporary political events and personalities define public perception concerning those events. The journalists exercise a great deal of influence on the nature and character of information disseminated to the public.

Findings further showed that the newspapers reported several issues within the national assembly within the period of study; these include financial corruption crises. The outcome of this study indicates that *Vanguard* newspaper reported 97.6%, *The Punch* (88.5%), *The Guardian* (87.9%) of financial corruption crisis. The newspapers also reported leadership crises and the result indicated that *Vanguard* reported 100.0% of leadership crisis, *The Punch* (98.3%), *The Guardian* (95.2%) of Leadership crisis. *Vanguard* newspaper reported more of leadership crisis than *The Punch* and *The Guardian*. The findings revealed that *Vanguard* newspaper reported (90.6%) of bribery crisis, *The Punch* newspaper (86.9%) and *The Guardian* newspaper reported 68.7% in the National Assembly from 1999 to 2016. *Vanguard* newspaper also reported more of bribery crisis than *The Punch* and *The Guardian* newspapers. Findings show that *Vanguard* newspaper reported 92.9% of forgery cases, *The Punch* (77.9%) and *The Guardian* (55.4%) in the National Assembly between 1999 and 2016. Senate President Bukola Saraki, his Deputy Senate President, Ike Ekweremadu, Senator Evans Enwerem among others were alleged to have been involved in one case of forgery or the other. Results indicated that *Vanguard* newspaper reported 77.6% of impeachment crisis, *The Guardian* (69.8%) and *The Punch* reported 61.5%. *Vanguard* newspaper reported more of impeachment stories than *The Punch* and *The Guardian* newspapers. Outcome of the study further revealed that *Vanguard* newspaper reported 82.4% of budget padding crisis in the House, *The Punch* (69.7%) and *The Guardian* reported 49.4%. Budget padding had been an entrenched process in finance and budgeting process in Nigeria through the years; however, it got to disturbing rate in 2016 as N100 billion was illegally padded in 2016 based on facts available from reviewed articles, inflating the budget to N6.06 trillion (Aguguom & Ehiogu, 2016).

Findings further showed that *Vanguard* newspaper reported 80.0% of election crisis, *The Punch* (56.6%) and the *Guardian* newspaper reported 48.2% of election crisis. President Olusegun Obasanjo's factor loomed high both in the emergence and removal of most of the Senate Presidents during the period under investigation. Obasanjo was accused of being dictatorial and powerful and that his influence was instrumental to Senator Evans Enwerem's defeat of Senator Chuba Okadigbo on June 3, 1999 tussle for the Senate President's race. Okadigbo was considered more influential but it was alleged that President Olusegun Obasanjo saw a potential threat to his authority in Okadigbo's popularity and attitude, and therefore, went all out to ensure Enwerem's victory in election that took place within the National Assembly. Okadigbo emerged Enwerem's

successor in an election within the Upper House in the year 2000. It took barely eight months of high lobby and politics to dethrone Okadigbo on August 8, 2000.

Results indicated that *The Punch* newspaper reported 21.3% of the third-term agenda, *Vanguard* (16.5%) and *The Guardian* (14.5%). Third-term crisis lasted for a short period- between 2005 and 2006 and did not reoccur in the subsequent years. The politics of tenure elongation was not considered as a serious issue at the initial stage. When some political analysts interpreted the proposed constitutional amendment to mean extension of tenure of executives, Nigerians began to be more curious about it. Third term bid of President Obasanjo triggered crisis in the National Assembly and attracted wide reportage by the Press across the nation. On May 16, 2006 after months of suspense and debates on the proposed constitution amendment that could have resulted in prolonged stay in office by the executive arm of government, the Senate stepped down the third term plan of the President. Third-term agenda crisis was the least reported among series of crises in the National Assembly during the period under investigation. It accounted for 2.4 % of stories on the crises under investigation. This might be due to the fact that it lasted for a short period- between 2005 and May 2006. The outcome of the study reveals a significant difference ( $P < 0.05$ ) in the frequency of crises reported across the select newspapers ( $F = 5.051$ ). This implies that there is difference in the frequency of National Assembly crises reported by *Vanguard*, *The Punch* and *The Guardian*. Furthermore, a post-hoc multiple comparison indicates the significant difference among the select newspapers with respect to the National Assembly crises reported using the Least Significance Difference (LSD) method.

The outcome indicates that there is significant difference in frequency of National Assembly crises reported in *Vanguard* (mean = 33.06), when compare with frequency of National Assembly crises reported in *The Guardian*. A significant difference was also reported in *The Guardian* (mean = 22.02) when compare with *Vanguard* newspaper. Also results show that *Vanguard* Newspaper had the highest frequency of National Assembly crises reported follow by *The Punch* and *The Guardian* respectively. The stated finding is in line with Daramola (2013) who notes that the press adequately covered government activities and that members of the public obtain most information on government activities from the Press. The result of the ANOVA tests conducted with the two null hypotheses indicates that there is statistically a significant difference between the newspapers and the types of crises reported as  $P < 0.05$ . It, therefore, means that the finding concurs with Banjo (2013) that the dominant characteristics of National Assembly crises during the fourth republic are the financial corruption and leadership crises.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study was undertaken to determine the reportage of crises in the National Assembly of Nigeria's Fourth Republic in select newspapers from 1999 to 2016. The researcher concluded that the select newspapers devoted great time and space to the reportage of National Assembly crises during the period under study. The press also reported different crises that emanated from the National Assembly during the period under investigation. Based on the findings and conclusion, the following recommendations are hereby given:

1. Newspapers should obtain information from different independent sources in order to enrich their information and disseminate balanced reports to the public.

2. Adequate accountability and transparency blueprint should be put in place in the National Assembly and the entire society to forestall financial corruption in our society.
3. Political parties, Independent Electoral Commission and other relevant departments should thoroughly screen candidates and their certificates before allowing them to contest for public positions in order to reduce the embarrassment of certificate forgery crises that disrupted normal law making process in the National Assembly.

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