

Newspaper Framing of Political Defections in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

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Abstract

This study interrogates how newspapers frame political defections with particular attention to sources, frame and impact of political defections on Nigerian democracy. Content analysis of four randomly selected newspapers - *Daily Sun*, *Vanguard*, *The Guardian* and *Nation* was carried out to achieve the study objectives. The study was anchored on framing theory. A total of three objectives and one hypothesis guided the study. The result showed that most of the stories examined cited sources from political actors. It was also found that most of the stories examined used episodic frame. Less attention was also paid to the negative impact of political defections. The study recommends, among others, that journalists should pay more attention to experts' sources when reporting political defections than sources from politicians.

Keywords: Campaign, Nigeria, Defections, Political Party, Newspaper

Introduction

Over the years, political defections have become a common feature of politicking in Nigeria. The trend usually becomes prominent during electioneering campaigns. Internal party wrangling, clash of personal interests and the desire to pursue and actualize political ambitions usually drive politicians into cross carpeting. For example, as a build up to the 2015 general elections, five Governors, Rotimi Ameachi from Rivers, Rabiu Kwankwaso from Kano, Abdufah Ahmed from Kwara, Aliyu Wamakko from Sokoto and Murtala Nyako from

Adamawa defected from the People's Democratic Party (PDP) to the All Progressive Congress (APC). These states were hitherto considered as the strong hold of the PDP. Also during the build up to the election, Ondo State Governor; Olusegun Mimiko defected from Labour Party to the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) while the then Speaker of the House of Representatives (now Sokoto State Governor) Aminu Tanbuwa defected, for the first time in the fourth republic, from the PDP to the APC. As a build up to the 2019 general election, some of those who had

defected from the PDP to the APC also went back to the PDP. Examples of such persons include PDP presidential flag-bearer Atiku Abubakar, Senate President Bukola Saraki, Sokoto State Governor Aminu Tambuwa, Senator Rabui Kwankwaso, among others. Other state governors like that of Benue, Samuel Ortom, and his Kwara State counterpart, Abdufah Ahmed also changed ship.

At the centre of these defections is the need for dividends of democracy which the general public expects in a democratic system. The media whose social responsibility it is to project and promote dividends of democracy must also demonstrate this in framing political defections. This is essential as it will set appropriate agenda for the public and guide them in recruiting the appropriate leaders through the ballot.

To frame means to slant a story towards a particular direction. Framing is the journalistic mechanism that makes the difference between media houses. This partly explains why after a press conference, journalists at the press conference may have different stories depending on the type of frames they choose to promote. Framing is very powerful such that a mere twitter post of between 10-14 words can be framed to project and promote different meanings depending on who is writing the news item, what the person wants to achieve, his/her understanding of the twitter post, among several other variables like religion, educational background etc. Entman (1993, p. 52) observes that to frame is to "Promote a

particular problem definition and/or treatment recommendation". Newspaper framing of political defections during the buildup of Nigeria's 2019 general election is, thus, essential because it offers insight into the type of frames such newspaper promoted.

A newspaper is an unbounded publication that is published on regular intervals which contains a variety of information (Uyo 1987). Nigerian newspapers are renowned for their active role in Nigeria's attainment of independence in 1960. Burgoon, Bernstein and Burgoon (1983) in a study on *newspaper function* conducted in which journalists and adults were surveyed on what they thought to be newspaper function, revealed that the respondents were of the opinion that newspapers provide a timely account of significant events and how important events and issues relate to the local community. Nigerian newspapers are vibrant tools of political communication. They are so active in their coverage of political news such that during electioneering campaigns, political news usually makes banner headlines of many newspapers while the citizens also increase their patronage at various newsstands across the length and breadth of the country (Ezeah & Gever, 2015). A study of newspaper framing of political defections, thus offer insight in determining how the media play their role as agenda setters. Nigerian newspapers have a responsibility to cover political defections in such a way that the

general public will be properly guided in their decision making process. Newspapers need to educate Nigerians on the manifestos of the various candidates and their political parties. The public needs to know what the politicians have for the electorate or not. Therefore, this study sought to ascertain newspaper framing of political defections in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Political defection is a common feature of Nigerian politics. Very few politicians in Nigeria have been identified with one political party. In most cases, they change party as the political atmosphere, in their view, demands. They issue press statements explaining how their supporters have compelled them to change party or how their current party has deviated or failed the masses. This trend is problematic because in party democracies, political parties are important instruments through which people are elected to provide dividends of democracy. Scholars (Aleyomi, 2013; Edet, 2017; Mbah, 2011) are of the view that political defections are not good for developing democracies like Nigeria. The media, as agenda setters, have the capacity to highlight the implications of such defections to the general public. Through the instrument of framing, the media could interpret and evaluate such defections to guide the masses in their voting decision. However, media framing of political defections have been under investigation, hence the need for this study.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to determine newspaper framing of political defections during the 2019 election season in Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. ascertain sources of stories on newspaper framing of political defections in Nigeria.
2. ascertain the dominant frame in newspaper framing of political defections in Nigeria.
3. examine newspaper framing of the impact of political defections in Nigeria

Hypothesis

This study tested one hypothesis as shown below:

Ho₁: There is a significant correlation between story source and newspaper framing of political defections.

Literature Review

Political defection is a term used in reference to an act where a member of one political party formally moves to another. In such a situation, the member submits his or her party identities to the former political party and registers with the new political party. In some instances, they form new political parties and register them. Aleyomi (2013) says that there are two ways defections take place. In the first instance, politicians move from different political parties into the ruling party during election seasons. The idea is to take part in party primaries of the ruling party. The

second movement starts after the party primaries. At this point those who could not secure party tickets during the primaries move to their previous political parties. Nwanegbo and Nnorom (2014) opine that it is a common practice in Nigeria's wobbling democracy for people to defect to other parties with the intention to get nominated from the party, and for a good number of them to return after elections to join the winning party to vie for positions in the government. Mbah, (2011) avers that party (political) defection or cross-carpeting certainly predates Nigeria's independence and is older than her sovereignty. Mbah adds that this has been determined and promoted by colonialism and sustained by the structures of post-colonial state. Aleyomi (2013) adds that it was colonialism that set the pace for modernization and economic development in Nigeria, while seriously changing the previous patterns of social, political and economic interactions among peoples and groups. Political defections have negative consequences on Nigeria's democracy. Such defections also have negative implications in delivering dividends of democracy. Nwanegbo and Nnorom (2014) in a study, political defections have negative impact on Nigeria's democracy. Edet (2017) holds that party defections have negative implications on Nigeria's political structure, dividends of democracy as well as a demonstration of a lack of party ideology among politicians (see also Okoro 2004, 2005).

How the media frame political

defections is essential because it could provide data regarding the contribution of the media in democratic advancements in Nigeria. Shaker (2011) notes that the amount of political information the electorate possess goes a very long way in influence their attitudes towards the political system. This means that newspapers are critical stakeholders in the election process. One important consideration in media framing is the source. The source is very important in the media of media framing. Gever (2018) describes the source as the frame because the source determines the frame to be used. Empirical evidence (e.g. Fahmy, 2005; Gever, Ukonu & Oyeoku, 2019) also showed a significant relationship between the media source and framing. Ngwu, Ekwe and Chiaha (2015) aver that the news media are basically seen by the type of frames they present to public domain. Newspaper framing is one of the most debated issues in the analysis of newspaper coverage of issues. Project for Excellence in Journalism (2009) did a study and identified 13 frames in newspaper coverage as follows: Straight news account, no dominant narrative frame other than outlining the basic who, what, when where, why and how. Conflict story: a focus on conflict inherent to the situation or brewing among the players. Consensus story: An emphasis on the points of agreement around an issue or event. Conjecture story: A focus around conjecture or speculation of what is to come Process. Story: An explanation of the process of

something or how something works. Historical outlook: How the current news fits into history. Horse race: Who is winning and who is losing. Trend story: The news as an ongoing trend. Policy explored: A focus on exploring policy and its impact. Reaction story: A response or reaction from one of the major players. Reality check: A close look into the veracity of a statement made or information given. Wrongdoing exposed: The uncovering of wrongdoing or injustice. Personality profile: A profile of the newsmaker. Framing, unarguably, is a strategy deployed by newspapers to moderate the attention of their readers.

Another category of frames which this study found useful is that by Iyengar (1991). The researcher outlined two different news frames namely episodic and thematic. Episodic stories pay attention to specific, usually immediate, events without reference to historical context, temporal sequence or greater consequence. On the other hand, thematic stories are analytical and provide a greater amount of context and background. According to Iyengar, episodic framing reduces "complex issues to the level of anecdotal evidence" (p.136) and cause errors by media audiences in proper attribution of responsibility for problems. Mahan and Griset (2007) in a study reported that television news coverage were purely episodic.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on the framing theory. The framing theory

states that the volume of coverage devoted to a particular issue is not as important as the frame the media adopt (Druckman 2001). The theory was propounded by Goffman (1974). The theorist posits that people interpret happenings within them through primary framework. This framework is considered as vital because it is taken for granted by the user. Goffman opines that there exists two distinctions within primary frameworks: natural plus social. Both plays the role of aiding persons interpret data. The difference between the two is functional. Natural frameworks point events as physical happenings taking natural quote literally and not attributing any social forces to the causation of events. Social frameworks view events as socially determined occurrences, due to the whims, goals, and manipulations on the part of other social players (people). Social frameworks are built on the natural frameworks. Goffman's basic assumption is that people are capable users of these frameworks daily. This theory is relevant to the current study because it provides insight in the study and understanding of newspaper framing of political defection in Nigeria during the buildup to the 2019 general elections.

Methodology

Design of the Study: The research adopted content analysis to achieve the objectives of this study. The choice of content analysis was because the study required an analysis of the manifest content of newspapers.

Population of the Study: The population of this study was made up of all the editions of the four newspapers within the period of seven months (August 1st, 2018 to February 28th, 2019). Therefore, the population was 848 (212 per a newspaper) newspaper editions.

Sample Size: The sample size of this study was made of four purposively selected national daily newspapers. They are *Daily Sun*, *Vanguard*, *The Guardian* and *Nation*. The choice of the newspapers was purposive because the objective of the sampling was not to compare the newspapers but have insights into the framing of political defection by four national newspapers. The study covered a period of August 1st, 2018 to February, 28th, 2019 when campaigns and party primaries took place. This means the study covered a period of seven months.

Sampling Technique: The census sampling approach was used to select the newspaper editions. Yang and Ishak (2012) are in agreement that a census often makes the most sense for research that examines a particular event or series of events. Therefore, all the newspaper editions within the period were sampled and examined for the presence of stories on political defections.

Instrument for Data Collection: The code sheet was used as the instrument for data collection. For the reliability of this study, two coders were randomly

selected to do the coding. They coded 25% of the result and the outcome yield an alpha value of 0.88, an indication of high reliability.

Unit of Measurement/Analysis: Unit of analysis for this study include news such as straight news stories, interview stories, features news stories, investigative news stories and interpretative news stories. Also, opinion such as opinion feature, column, editorial and letter to the editor were considered.

Content Categories: The following content categories were measured in the study:

- **Sources of Stories:** The emphasis here was to ascertain the origin of stories. Here the following were delineated:
- **Politicians:** Stories that cited political actors as their sources. Sources from political aides were also counted as political sources.
- **Experts:** Stories that cited experts like political analysts.
- **Others:** Sources that did not belong to either of the two.

Frame Used

Here, the following were used:

- **Thematic Frame:** Frames that provide background information on the defections reported.
- **Episodic:** These are stories that only report the defections without background information.

Impact of Defection

Here, the attention was to ascertain

how the media frame the impact of defections on Nigeria's democracy.

- **Negative:** Stories that frame the negative impact of political defections on Nigeria's democracy.
- **Positive:** Stories that highlight the positive aspects of political defections on Nigeria's democracy.
- **Neutral:** Stories that had frame neither the positive nor the negative side of the of political defections.

Method of Data Analysis: Data were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. That is, simple percentage and correlation analysis tools were used. Results were presented in tables.

Results

A total of 212 newspaper editions for each of the four newspapers were examined. Cumulatively, 848 editions of the newspapers were examined. Among all the newspapers, only 144 editions had stories on political defections. These editions were examined and a total of 206 stories on political defections were generated for analysis. The results are presented below:

Table 1: Sources of Stories on Newspaper Framing of Political Defections in Nigeria

Sources	Frequency	Percentages
political sources	87	42.2
Expert sources	40	19.4
Others	79	38.3
Total	206	100.0

The Table above sought to ascertain the sources of newspaper framing of political defections in Nigeria. The result showed that most of the stories cited political sources with less attention to expert sources.

Table 2: Frames of Political Defections

Frame	Frequency	Percentages
Episodic	149	72.3
Thematic	57	27.7
Total	206	100.0

In Table 2 above, the researcher sought to examine the theme of media framing of political defections. The result showed that there was less attention to thematic frame, instead, more attention was paid to episodic frame.

Table 3: Newspaper Framing of the Impact of Political Defections

Impact	Frequency	Percentages
Negative	43	20.9
Positive	39	18.9
Neutral	124	60.2
Total	206	100.0

The essence of Table 3 was to ascertain newspaper framing of the impact of political defections on Nigeria's democracy. It was found that the newspapers were largely neutral in their framing of the impact of such political defections. To ascertain the relationship between story source and framing, the following table was computed:

Table 4 Correlation Analysis of the Relationship between Story Source and Framing

Item	$\rho_{X,Y}$	p. value	Decision
1 Story source	.833**	0.001	Sig
2 frame	.968**	0.001	Sig

The Table above was computed to ascertain the association between story source and framing of political defections. The outcome of the study showed that both story source and framing significantly correlate. The assumption was supported, the only hypotheses in the study was accepted. Therefore, the researcher concludes with 95% confidence that story source insignificantly correlate framing.

Discussion of Findings

In this study, the researcher examined newspaper framing of political defection with particular attention to sources of story, frame used and the impact of political defections on Nigeria's democracy. The result of the study suggests that most of the stories cited politicians. Insignificant attention was paid to sources from experts like political analysts. This is not an impressive outcome because when newspapers cite sources from politicians, it is likely to influence their framing. The result of the correlation analysis also revealed a significant correlation between sources cited and the frames used. The result of the hypothesis testing also suggests a significant correlation between story sources and frames used. This result is

similar to that of Gever (2019) who reported a significant correlation between story sources and frames used. This result also suggests that most of the newspaper stories were less analytical and only focus attention on the defections without provide analytical interpretation of the stories reported. It was also found that most of the stories used episodic frame. In other words, background information was not provided.

This result is similar to that of Mahan and Griset (2007). The use of episodic frame is an indication of a shallow job by the newspapers examined. They could not provide their readers with the guide they need to make informed decision. Finally, it was found that the newspapers examined could not report the negative impact of political defection on Nigeria's democracy. This is despite the fact that political defection is inimical to the growth of Nigerian democracy. This assumption is supported by evidence in literature (Edet, 2017; Mbah, 2011). The results of the current study have implications on the framing theory by showing how the media could highlight aspects of an issue and project them to the general public. The newspapers examined had the opportunity to highlight the negative impact of political defections but decided to highlight the neutral frame.

Conclusion

Based on the result of this study, it is concluded that the newspapers examined poorly framed political

defections during the buildup to Nigeria's general election of 2019. This is because critical issues that could help the readers in putting political defections in proper perspective were ignored or poorly handled or both. Such issues include source selection, frames used as well as the impact of political defections on the advancement of Nigeria's nascent democracy. The basic contribution of this study is that it has provided evidence-based understanding on the newspaper framing of political defections in Nigeria. This is an aspect that has been under-investigated, especially among African scholars.

Recommendations

Based on the result of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. There is the need for journalists to improve on their source selection regarding political defections. Sources from experts like political analysts could be useful in explaining and educating the general public on political defections and how they impact on Nigeria's democracy.
2. It is also recommend that journalists covering the political beat should go above only reporting political defections, they should provide background information about the politicians defecting, political parties and possibly compare it with advanced democracies to make their report richer.
3. The study also recommends that journalists reporting political

defections should not only stay neutral, they should go a step further and explain to their readers the negative impact of political defections on Nigeria's democracy.

4. Further studies should be conducted to examine public perception of media framing of political defections in Nigeria. This could be useful to expand literature in this direction.

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