

The Media and Challenges of Adopting Western Democracy: Nigeria and the Restructuring Debate

Hadiza Wada

Ahmadu Bello University, Samaru, Zaria, Nigeria
hiwada@abu.edu.ng

ABSTRACT: This study using the media effect theory, particularly the agenda setting theory, hypothesized that a heated media debate over what was tagged national 'restructuring conference' in Nigeria was a subject of deliberate media 'framing.' The issue which advocated for circumventing the federal legislature created much emotional rhetoric, where existing democratic structures suffice in debating and addressing the issues the conference was supposed to address. A random survey of Nigerian citizens confirmed that the issue was overrated in importance by the media. An analysis of the frequency of news coverage of restructuring by major newspapers during peak debating time confirmed that the hyping was disproportionally coming from sectional special interests, as opposed to balanced reporting based on national interest. Highlighted in the paper is the negative use of 'framing' to influence and divert the audience's attention from more critical issues plaguing Nigeria. The study recommends that the media, in consonance with its ethical code of social responsibility joins other institutions in strengthening democratic structures above all else, including special interests.

KEYWORDS: Nigerian Press, Media and Democracy

1. Introduction

For the past two decades, radical anti-democratic elements in Nigeria representing some special interests largely identified with ethno-regional (geographic) interests, have campaigned for some specifically designed issues through calls for national conferences

(including in 2006 and 2014). These issues, not being in the general national interest, have already been determined to fail by its agitators, if tabled through the regular democratic channels including the National Assembly. They therefore find other means of forcing their desires onto the nation undemocratically. Today the same agitators are campaigning for another conference tagged restructuring.

These conferences share many characteristics in common, one of which is the circumvention of established democratic structures, in preference for the President's handpicked nominees to represent the nation in the conference. This continues to take place in derogation of elected representatives serving in national and state legislatures, a reason why some scholars rightfully tagged such conferences illegal (Ibrahim 2016). These calls that always produce emotionally charged debates and tension has so far cost the nation so much in life, property and resources, and has continued to derail the citizens' attention from more crucial national issues (Kari 2018).

The media has been largely used in several ways to achieve that recurring undemocratic agenda as is presently being used for a campaign to hold a third of such conferences. The issue of national 'restructuring' conference came to the fore in the Nigerian media around mid-year 2017. It reached its peak during the final months of 2017 and has subsided somewhat presently (March 2018). The restructuring issue seems to be the newest national debate that has always utilized the media effectively to achieve undemocratic, unjust and debilitating agenda for the Nigerian nation and its people. Globally however, democratic nations discuss everything considered a national issue mild and critical, in their legislature, respecting the nations' constitutional provisions and existing democratic structures. Nigeria practicing constitutional democracy should not be different. Yet several globally embarrassing, yet serious schemes, not common in other nations, advanced and developing, have been hatched by special interest groups and allowed to take place within the last twenty years (1999-2018) in Nigeria.

In the world's most enduring democracy today, the United States, the media has been historically described as the 'fourth estate' alongside the executive, Judiciary, and the legislature because it is supposed to hold a cardinal responsibility (the ethical code of social responsibility) in protecting democratic principles on behalf of the people it serves. "The fourth estate refers to the watchdog role of the press, one that is important to a functioning democracy" (Gill 2017), a major reason why the First Amendment to the US Constitution guarantees 'the press' freedom from government interference. When the press abdicate from its duty, the result reverberates and may create negative doorways for dictatorial and unlawful activities to creep in and overshadow issues of governance and administration.

1.1 Definition of Restructuring

The word 'restructuring' may connote changing the physical structure of something. The Cambridge dictionary defines restructure thus; 'to organize a system (or something) in a new way to make it operate more effectively.' Over the few months that the issue has dominated the Nigerian Media however, various intellectuals, politicians and academicians have demonstrated the confusion in defining what they mean by the concept, as it means different things to different agitators for it. Some have attempted to clarify what it means in the Nigerian context (Ogih 2017). However it is clear, "most of the calls for restructuring had been from individuals and groups from the southern part of Nigeria' (This Day 2017).

To residents of south eastern region of Nigeria, those agitating for restructuring conference mean practically ceding (breaking away) from the nation and forming an independent country. That movement is being championed by an organization called Indigenous People of Biafra, IPOB. To south western Nigerians, it means granting more powers to the state against the federal government in the form of what they describe as 'federating states.' Former Vice President Atiku Abubakar in a speech at University of Nigeria, Nsukka, describes that position best; to reduce the power and roles of the federal government and to "return some items on the concurrent list to the states" (Atiku 2017). To the south-south (Nigerian Delta region) where crude is explored and extracted, the view is 'let each state of the federation control its territorial natural resources and only remit taxes to the central or Federal Government' (Hon 2017). Majority Muslim Northern Nigerians with more than two third of the country's land mass and 19 out of 36 states do not yet seem to have a popular demand under restructuring.

1.2. Background to the Problem

The current call for national restructuring conference, also insists on bypassing federal legislature, the universally accepted democratic means of deliberations and resolutions of national issues, established in all nations practicing democracy. The journey for forcing unpopular special interest demands without soliciting the electorates' opinion started with 'rotational presidency' of the Peoples' Democratic Party, PDP, which became a reality in 1999 with the realization of the Olusegun Obasanjo Presidency. Rotational presidency, in violation of the constitution, reserves the office of the president to some ethnic residents of a geographical region of Nigeria, which they will exclusively fill and pass on to another geographical region after completing its term. Rotational presidency even in dictatorial or military administrations is a misnomer across the planet, let alone in a nation practicing constitutional democracy.

Rotational presidency was mainly explained away by the political elite and retired military officers that unilaterally forced it on the nation, as an attempt to gratify residents of south western Nigeria over the annulment of the 1993 elections, where a south western native resident, Moshood Abiola, was believed to have been on his way to winning. The Nigerian historical fact remains, however, that the annulment incident was just one of several cases where Nigerian military officers either prevented or toppled a legitimately elected civilian government (January 15, 1966, and December 31, 1983) or the military toppling another military administration (July 29, 1966; July 30, 1975; February 13, 1976; August 27, 1985, and November 17, 1993).

The principle of universal adult suffrage falls under “human rights” which provides the “right to democracy” as contained in “Article 21” of the United Nations Charter on human rights.” It is also embodied in the universal declaration of human right and the entire body of international human rights law. As for Nigerians, the right to vote for its citizen 18 years and over are contained in sections and subsections 77 (2); 117 (2), 132 (5) and 178 (5) of the Nigerian constitution, as one of the most critical means through which individuals can influence governmental decision-making.

And because rotational presidency in 1999 was used to subvert the various constitutional guarantees including one man one vote to justify sectional special interests, against the right of any Nigerian to seek the office of the President regardless of where he comes from, the gradual disregard for constitutional guarantees and its laws followed. Since then a crack for future exploitation was forced in for those whose respect for rule of law was negligible to none, as two other similar unconstitutional circumventions of the legislature in discussing national issues (2006 and 2014), and violations of democratic principles were tabled and held by two democratically elected presidents (Obasanjo and Jonathan Administrations). Since then, the downward spiral to the rule of chaos, insecurity, and brute force came to the forefront in Nigeria until the present day.

Having succeeded in mortally wounding Nigerian canonical source of law with the rotational presidency issue, Obasanjo administration 1999-2007 that benefitted from that formula, tried to root itself for a third electoral term, again in violation of constitutional provision (Chapter 6, Part 1, Section 135 of the Nigerian Constitution) that provides for only two terms of four years each. The administration arranged for a tenure elongation conference a year before completion of its term (in 2006). Nigerian citizens were once again forced by the Obasanjo administration to go along, had it not been for a concerted effort from various coffers and groups that prevented the third term presidency beyond 2007, the conference that was held, might have succeeded in an unconstitutional legitimization of a lifetime president for Nigeria.

And because the nation tolerated the convening of the 2006 conference that gulped massive financial resources the second time, the Jonathan Administration had the courage to force its way with a handpicked 492 delegates nominated by the executive on partisan grounds for another unconstitutional conference in 2014. With an expenditure of over seven billion Naira (Ibrahim, 2016), the Jonathan Administration's attempt also failed. Jonathan's two main goals were described as trying (a) to satiate a segment of Nigerian southern majority Christian states for their votes, while (b) perpetuating himself in power.

In his paper, (Ibrahim, 2016), a newspaper columnist and academic scholar writes "My basic view however remains that on the whole, the National Conference lacked legitimacy. At the end of the Conference, I had published my column of 17th August 2014 with the title: "The National Conference: They Dared, They Failed" I was shocked at the fact that they tried to conclude the Conference with an agenda of tenure elongation." The conference was held one year before general elections. And once again, the legitimate structure recognized by the constitution as appropriate to address national issues was ignored.

All these past globally embarrassing records, have become a sad reality and now part of Nigerian history. All these three wholly documented maneuverings circumvented the legitimate and constitutional way of dealing with their root causes. In any nation of the world practicing democracy, issues like these should have been tabled before the national assembly where elected representatives from all nooks and corners of the country, elected to represent all legitimate interests of its citizens fairly and proportionately, will deliberate and find legitimate solutions to the issues as enshrined in the nation's constitution.

As for rotational Presidency which was practically forced on the nation without any vote or public consultation, during the Abubakar Abdulsalami Military transitional Administration, when no legislature was yet in place, a simple referendum vote should have been held immediately to source acceptability or otherwise from the electorate. In any case, no political party, and absolutely none, should have been allowed by Nigerian democratic institutions most especially the courts, to enshrine any formula that is in violation of a key segment of the nation's constitution.

So today, instead of placing some critical vices that plague the nation threatening to grind it to a halt on the agenda for discussion by the media, Nigerians have to deal with yet another digression agenda emanating from the same elements representing special interests (ThisDay 2017). The same people who drummed up the beat of the earlier unconstitutional conferences that threw the country into its present lawlessness, want even more disproportionate share of innocent citizens' commonwealth.

As we write not one public prosecution and execution of one kidnapper, bomber, criminal gang member has taken place, while these heinous crimes are a daily occurrence in the country. The whole nation, and more so the northern states of Nigeria are facing massive threats to life from all quarters, be it bombings, armed robberies, kidnappings, criminal gangs residing in various state forests in Zamfara, Kaduna, Katsina States, etc. The idea of northern Nigerians always waiting for the next 'insincere' and 'self-serving' (Ibrahim, 2016) agenda rooted by political elites from other sections of the country to react to, does not make much sense.

1.3. Statement of the problem

This study sets out to conduct two surveys. One is a survey of randomly selected adult Nigerians 22 years and above to find out the order of priority of specifically selected issues Nigerians presently face as against restructuring issue as a subject matter. This will tell us whether restructuring as defined and prioritized by the media (agenda setting role) is at the same level of prominence as the audience's ranking of the matter. The second question tests the regional/ethnic bias of the Nigerian press. Here two specifically selected media issues were studied across some prominent Nigerian dailies to see how much coverage (prominence) specific papers give the two chosen subject matters. One is on the subject of national restructuring conference itself, and the other an offshoot of the restructuring debate, i.e. the agitation for ceding from Nigeria to form a nation called Biafra by a group called Indigenous People of Biafra, IPOB. The IPOB campaign is part and parcel of the issues the restructuring conference was supposed to address. Specific questions to be answered by the survey include; (1) Whether the agenda of restructuring conference was set by some special interests and framed to win audience's attention and its prominence hyped by the media. (2) Whether Nigerian citizens as the audience of Nigerian press rank the importance of restructuring as an issue as high as the Nigerian Press.

1.4. Justification

To those who care for the continued existence of a country called Nigeria, African continental peace, and more especially a more equitable and just treatment of the Nigerian people under the current presidential system of government, this study is necessary. Those also who share the goal of spreading a just and equitable democratic system of leadership across the globe, must care for strengthening the existing democratic structures, rather than individual dictators and self-serving political elite. The financial cost in another reason. For the two previous conferences, official figures, minus bribes that exchanged hands stand in the billions of Naira or multi-million

dollars. Money that could go into various sectors in a country plagued by poverty, and overwhelmed by corruption. For the 2006 Obasanjo third term project conference Osahon writes; "The 'Unity Forum,' a pro-third term lobbying group, buying signatures of members of the House of Representatives with one million naira per signature to support the lobby, claimed to have already collected 100 signatures by the first week of February 2006. Billions of naira was reported to have been set aside for the third term project' (Osahon 2010). The 2014 Jonathan Administration tenure elongation conference, without lobby expenses cost 7 billion naira (Ibrahim 2016). Another issue was the frustrations caused by the digression agenda of such conferences, while other crucial life and death issues plague the nation without any visible effort from such governments for finding credible solutions. And finally the need to study and analyze the recurring 'national conference' issue that repeatedly circumvents democratic structures, with the intension of finding means of terminating future recurrences.

1.5. Theoretical Framework

Within the realm of the social sciences, the Agenda Setting Theory of mass media provides a framework for understanding the issue academically. The theory first came to light in 1968, having been developed and argued by Max McCombs and Donald Shaw in a study on the 1968 American presidential election. Their abstract (McCombs & Shaw 1972) states in part "In choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff, and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality. Readers learn not only about a given issue, but also how much importance to attach to that issue." The father of that line of thought was actually Bernard C Cohen, who in 1963 after conducting a study writes 'mass media may not be successful in telling its readers what to think, but is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about.' Of relevance to this discourse (Scheufele 2000) is also agenda-building segment developed by the Langs (1981) using the Watergate scandal to conduct a study of how stories develop over time, focusing on the framers ability in maintaining the story's prominence. In fact an authority on the 'framing' aspect (Scheufele 1999) conducted researches on the subject, proposing various models that best describe the theory. "The basis of framing theory is that the media focuses attention on certain events and then places them within a field of meaning. ... In essence, framing theory suggests that how something is presented to the audience (called "the frame") influences the choices people make about how to process that information.'

In short positively, negatively or even with bias, the media may overhype a specific topic and give it so much importance that it forces the media users (audience) to attach

some importance as well as pay attention to it. To date, after almost half a century, that theory continues to have relevance within the field of social science across the globe. Starting from the 1980s the focus of media effects studies shifted to 'social constructivism' i.e., the media having strong impact in 'constructing aspects of social reality... by framing social reality ... in a patterned and predictable way' (McQuail 1994). The idea of framing, within the field of media effects theory stems from the reality of the choices of material on specific topics by media professionals over time. 'Mass media actively sets the frame of reference that readers and viewer use to interpret and discuss public events' (Tuchman 1978). In essence, media constructed material have influence over how individuals frame and ingest the message, whenever the same topic is discussed, with the result that over time most of what one publically knows and consequently use to analyze information regarding the issue has been psychologically spoon fed to him over time by the media (Scheufele 1999).

Some scholars (Fairhurst and Sarr 1996) further described media framing methods, such as framing a news item using specific cultural values, slogans, phrases, or some emotional cultural experience, or even describing an event or issue through contrasts (what it is not). Media scriptwriters and news framers may also repeat some sensitizing or desensitizing catch phrases that may come to identify or stereotype any other news about the same subject in the future. A good example today is when you mention the word terrorist, it has come to evoke immediate identification with Muslims, whether the person is indeed Muslim or not. 'People's information processing and interpretation are influenced (Kosicki & McLeod 1990) by preexisting meaning structures or schemas' (Scheufele, 1999). You can hardly avoid mental pictures as soon as such buzz words are uttered, because you have been conditioned subliminally to think that way by past news stories. In media effects studies therefore, framing is seen as not only related to agenda setting theory, but as an extension of it (McCombs, Shaw & Weaver 1997).

2. Literature Review

Using the media for community control, influence and at times to manipulate the audience's knowledge, perception and oftentimes actions in Nigeria is not new. So also setting the audiences' priorities and/or acting as an agent for digression agenda from more critical issues, a tactic that agenda setting theory verifies. Many scholars and studies have confirmed such practices in the Nigerian press case. Some have pinned most of the blame on media ownership (Soibi 2008). On the subjective and biased nature of news reporting by the Nigerian press, where ethnic, religious and

regional (geographical) bias are evident in news reporting, various studies have been conducted (Asagwa & Asemah 2012), (Kari 2018), and (Soibi 2008).

Specifically on the national conferences, scholars (Ibrahim 2016) have articulated some of the issues, referring in these words to the 2014 conference of the Jonathan Administration “As a whole, the national conference lacked legitimacy.” And the conference’s decision to use voice vote instead of vote count in conformity with the rules was described thus “The entire decisions taken at the conference were not only illegitimate, they were also illegal.” These are not the only issues. Added to all was the lack of regard for the courts and the constitution. In 2005 when a 16 count charge (later increased to 18 counts) were tabled in a bill at the National Assembly to impeach the then President Obasanjo, the counts included one about his disregard for the constitution and court rulings including Supreme Court judgements (Osahon 2010).

As long as the rich are able to enforce their influence and ideas over the people through media commercialization in privately supported media enterprises, the issue will persist (Asagwa & Asemah 2012). Democracy as a system in countries with weak or early stage democratic structures will continue to be threatened if measures are not taken. The duo’s work specifically dwelled on Nigerian democracy and the threats to its survival. Pens for hire should not be the case in Nigeria (Kari 2018), because in other nations of the world advertisements and opinions are clearly ascribed to their advocates, as the press tries to preserve their credibility. The sneaky way that special interests overwhelm the Nigerian media, selling opinions as facts, further made worse by social media need to be examined and fixed.

While in their book (Oso & Pate 2011), two scholars argued that historic antecedents have consistently caused friction between Nigerian press advocacy on behalf of the people for policy changes to eradicate poverty, corruption by public officials and politicians and other vices. The issue to them is, authoritarian military rulers have stood in the way and punished journalists severely at times. What this study reiterates, however, is the fact that Nigerian civilian government has lasted two decades without interruption, but issues threatening the foundations of democracy and its institution seem to only get worse, as also echoed by another writer. As aptly expressed (Kari 2018), ‘the way and manner the media – both mainstream and social media – report events and issues, particularly politics and conflicts, in Nigeria constitute a clear and present danger to the unity, stability, cohesion and even corporate existence of the country.’

Other scholars (Ayodele 1988) see subjectivity and sycophancy, i.e. pleasing those holding wealth and power for personal gain as two complimentary vices that the Nigerian media are guilty of. He states ‘frequently, the journalist in Nigeria slants his news and plays up (or plays down) reported events because he is unwilling to offend or

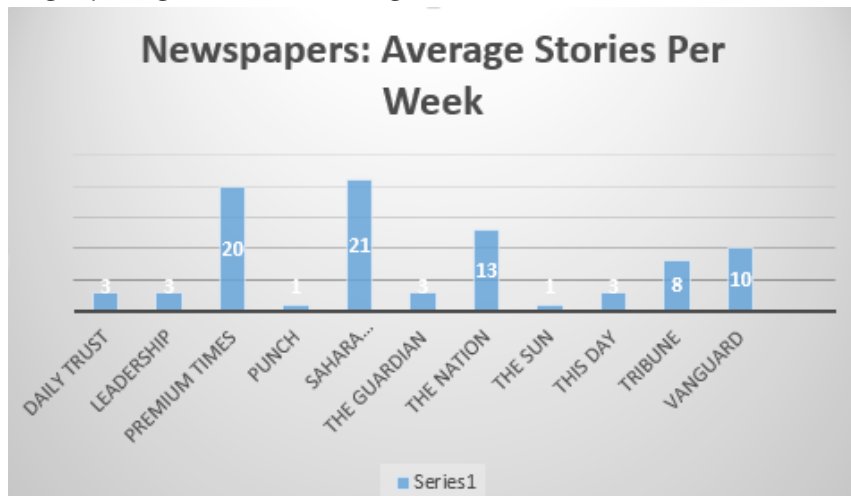
hurt those who sustain his media.’ By this he means the government, rich politicians, and owners of private enterprises that support news entities through advertisements.

3. Methodology

To answer the first of two questions, i.e. Whether the agenda of restructuring conference was set by some special interests and intentionally framed to win audience’s attention with its prominence hyped by the media, the study scanned some selected newspapers consistently, and daily, for stories relating to two raging issues throughout September 2017 (a) restructuring, and an offshoot of the issue (b) IPOB ceding campaign which generated so much heat at that time. Thirteen most popular newspapers were chosen for the study. The research design was quantitative content analysis to allow for objective categorization of media content. According to Berelson (1952) content analysis is “a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication.’ The focus of the quantitative content analysis was mainly frequency, measured in the number of subject-matter stories printed daily by a paper. For the second question, as to whether Nigerian audience rank the importance of restructuring as an issue as high as the Nigerian Press, a brief questionnaire was designed that specifically asks that respondents rank a few current issues in order of importance. It also sought their preference for what should lead media discussions and debates, in their opinion. The list of issues included poverty, kidnapping, Boko Haram, vehicular fuel scarcity, and the subject matter issue, i.e. national restructuring conference.

4. Data Presentation

The result for the newspaper story survey is represented by the chart in average stories per week category. (Fig. 1) below: Fig. 1



As we can see, some papers gave significantly more space to presenting stories on restructuring and the one aspect of it that has recently caused much crisis in the general area, i.e. canvassing for breaking away from Nigeria by south east regional residents.

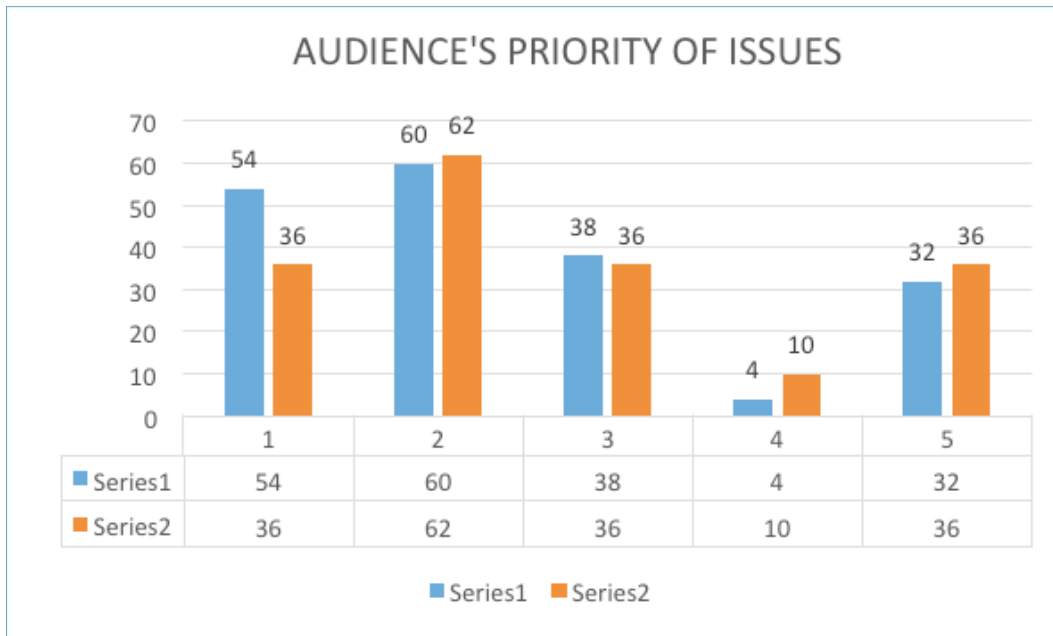
The two newspapers that proved more proactive, with a weekly average of number of stories posted about Restructuring and Southeast Army/IPOB crisis, as per the chart above were Sahara Reporters (21) and Premium Times (20) followed by The Nation (13) and Vanguard (10).

As for the second question, whether Nigerians rank the importance of restructuring as an issue as high as the Nigerian Press, we issued about 200 questionnaires to every third person that comes through the door at a public mall. Study chose a public area for diversity and variety of respondents to avoid in built errors for occupation, interests, age and other factors connected with occupational areas. We were able to retrieve and use 180 for this study. The chart below represents the results, where you will find that the bars to the left (Series 1) represents respondents ranking of restructuring in importance. Despite so much emotional political debate that to some extent caused international diplomatic tension, especially when the IPOB leader campaigning for the breakup of Nigeria who has British citizenship was declared wanted by Nigerian security personnel over treasonable utterances and activities. Surprisingly the respondents dwelled on social and economic issues as priorities. Respondents saw 'poverty' as the top issue that should get the most attention at 60 respondents, followed by the menace of incessant kidnapping and ransom demand by criminals at 54. Restructuring got 38 respondents followed by Boko Haram security challenge at 32 respondents.

It may surprise many, most especially internationally, that Boko Haram that made so much news abroad has been rated fourth. The reality to Nigerians, however, may not be surprising as the present Buhari Administration has successfully reduced the menace significantly and has degraded the efficacy of the militant group.

Series two, the bars to the right, recorded the respondents' preference as to what should lead media discussion, so credible solutions to the issue may be found. Again poverty led, while three issues got a tie vote at 36 each. They are kidnapping, restructuring and Boko Haram.

Figure 1. Respondents' priority ranking



5. Discussion of Results Regarding Media Role on Restructuring Debate

As indicated by the survey, some social and economic issues tend to lead citizens' priority above national restructuring. The basic issue of survival, such as poverty and also security to life such as kidnapping menace and Boko Haram are of primary importance. Restructuring has already been categorized by scholars as a political issue dwelling on power-sharing between state and federal government, as well as mineral resource control as described earlier. So far, as the survey revealed, despite credible action by the present Buhari Administration in beating back the Boko Haram security challenges militarily in the field, lack of similar actions and/or success registered against criminal activities has suppressed the celebration of success. Criminal activities are presently led by incessant kidnappings of civilians for ransom on Nigerian highways. From survey results, we can conclude that the hypothesis on prioritizing and hyping restructuring has been confirmed. Not only are there democratic structures such as the legislature and courts available to deal civilly with the issues for which the clarion call for national restructuring was made, other more critical issues plague the nation exists as rated by respondents of the survey, but were not set high on the agenda, neither were they framed right to garner the required attention and scrutiny they deserve.

A similar conclusion was reached by a study that examined media coverage of the 'third term agenda' national conference of 2006 (Soibi 2008). 240 editions of newspapers and 192 editions of magazines were selected using systematic sampling technique for editions between March, 2005-March, 2006. *TheNews* magazine owned and published by former President Obasanjo's regional natives far exceeded others in its framing of the news in favor of his tenure elongation, i.e. regional, religious, and ethnic subjectivity.

Mass media in most nations are not confined to reacting to daily news and other issues thrown at them. They take the lead as facilitators in key investigative reporting, factual documentaries that expose genuine issues and mandate the relevant administrative and governing structures to deal with them. They set the rightful and objective agenda constantly, and do not wait on emergencies to befall them before they act.

In the United States for example, the major television networks are regularly churning out and spotlighting critical issues the nation needs to address and in a timely manner too. They place important issues on the agenda, and invite the rightful personalities, officials, politicians and professionals concerned to sit together and discuss it on mass media. That way people can be fully educated and even have the chance to call in and have their concerns addressed by those professionals. Programmes such as *Meet the Press* (NBC), *Face the Nation* (CBS) etc. broadcast during the weekends are there to set the agenda for the week. Issues they address gets picked up by radio stations, and other current affair programmes during the week. You may see and hear from the Secretary of Defense on issues of security, Secretary of State on Foreign Policy dilemmas, etc.

While some private television stations in Nigeria such as, AIT, TVC, and most especially Channels, do a better job, and government owned NTA also sometimes address the issues, the reality, as described in some studies (Soibi, 2008) is that Nigerian Media is neck deep into the plaguing national problem of ethnic, regional, and religious biases that tend to impact on the seriousness with which they take their profession. The press appear more entrenched in biased and subjective reporting, than the electronic media. It is very easy to tell who owns what newspaper in Nigeria by the kind of mostly subjective headlines and stories they cover.

That led us to find out who owns or manages the two top newspapers with the highest frequencies of coverage from our survey. Sahara Reporters claim on their site to be 'an online news agency based in New York City that focuses on promoting citizen journalism by encouraging everyday people to report stories.' While on its 'about' page it states 'Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference.'

As for Premium Times for which qualitative analysis of framing, just from the choice of words for the headlines, reveals its personal interest geared more towards promoting the achievement of restructuring, than even curbing the IPOB crisis that claimed several lives. That is not surprising if you find out who the publisher and editor-in-chief are, as well as where they have been and when. According to its about page, Premium Times publisher and chief executive officer is Dapo Olorunyomi, while its editor-in-chief is Musikilu Mojeed. Olorunyomi was co-founder of *TheNews* magazine in Lagos; and founder of the Wole Soyinka Centre for Investigative Journalism. Both have stayed in the United States at some point in their careers. While one of the papers is headquartered overseas (Sahara Reporter), even the one operating in Nigeria *TheNews*, displayed much foreign influence. It should be noted that *TheNews* was also indicted by the 2006 survey for subjective reporting against democratic principles, promoting instead tenure elongation for Obasanjo Administration.

In addition, any Nigerian who had followed the initial Sovereign National Conference agitation that started all these national conference calls, now rebranded as restructuring, knows one of its founding agitators was indeed Wole Soyinka.

5.1 On Fiscal Issues

Presently, nothing in the constitution stops state government from deliberating and implementing various avenues for within state generation of funds (internal revenue) for development, and it does not have to be mineral resources. The mindset that state governments should always rely on federal funds for all financial spending is ridiculous and unsustainable (Wada 2017). So making waves over federal statutory allocations and using it to hold the country ransom is diversionary. This writer has delivered a paper recently at a university conference in Kaduna State University on the various ways state governments can generate legitimate funds, as universally done in other nations practicing similar forms of government.

‘Most Nigerian state governments, mainly for political electability reasons, feel the need only to satisfy salary demands of their workforce, a reason why only a few states make any noticeable policies for job creation, or infrastructural developmental changes over the years. But the state work force is usually no more that 17% of total state population. A whopping 83% who mostly reside in several other towns and villages outside the state capital remain unproductive.’ Ensuring favorable government policies that encourage the establishment and support for small businesses will greatly assist in nurturing a productive population.

Wada also suggested various means of internal revenue generation for states, such as legitimate taxes, fees and fines. Just one, such as setting up an efficient license fee collecting system, i.e. getting all adult drivers in a state of about 7 million with 200,000 adult drivers to acquire genuine (bi-annually renewable) driver's license and pay the required N11 thousand will fetch the state government N2.2 billion every two years. Imagine if that money is repeatedly used to set up industries over the years. That will provide employment to the wandering youths and adults, further cutting down on crime and other social ills, while boosting the industrial economy of that state.

In fact most of the suggested means for generating funds were found to have been in existence in some progressive minded states like Lagos. For example, 'from 1999 to 2013, the revenue collected by Lagos state internal revenue agency LIRS is claimed to have risen from a monthly average of N600 million to more than N20 billion a month. What it gets from the federal statutory allocation is about N8 billion out of which N6 is spent on salaries alone. LIRS in fact claimed 'for more than ten years, 70% of Lagos State budget is internally generated' (Wada 2017).

5.2 On Resource Control

In line with our premise that all these mass and social media campaigns are schemes that defy universal normalcy, no nation on this planet approaches the issue of tapping and utilizing its crude the way Nigerian agitators of resource control do. Most oil rich nations are considered developing countries, yet consider their wealth a national resource. This applies to the Middle East who control the largest global reserves, to Latin America, Western and Eastern Europe. All nations individually unite at national level to utilize the resource for their nation, against greedy outside forces, while Nigeria stands divided from within to its detriment. Such countries include Brazil, Russia, Indonesia, Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, etc. Because they do not concentrate on personal greed, sabotage, crisis, and schemes sabotaging their ability to utilize this natural resource, they have made great headway in terms of national development.

For example, since 1994, after 'Saudi Aramco subsidiary acquired a 40% equity interest in Petron Corp., the largest crude oil refiner and marketer in the Philippines, Saudi Aramco (2014) has taken on the responsibility of refining oil and distributing it in the country.' Saudi Aramco headquartered in Dahrn Saudi Arabia, an equivalent of Nigeria's NNPC, is the world's largest oil and gas company by revenue, \$478 billion.

Article 22 (XII) of the Constitution of Brazil, 1988, vests exclusive legislative powers in the Federal Government on "mineral deposits, other mineral resources, and metallurgy." (Hon 2017). The United States is no different in terms of federal

control of the nation's resources and their protection. The law of eminent domain in the United States goes even beyond that, where for critical issues of national interests, the federal government can even decide to relocate people from their lands and take it over in the national interest.

'The Federal Constitutions of Australia (1990) and South Africa (1997) and Russia (1993) are rather silent on "resource control"... (but) their central Governments are having coterminous powers over the natural resources of the said countries.' (Hon 2017). Hon concluded that '...none of the countries operating a federal Constitution has permitted total fiscal autonomy to the federating units as has been consistently canvassed in Nigeria.'

On the issue of resource control and the 'oil producing states,' Dr. Chafe clarifies it better in his 2014 editorial on ARDP publication

"Nigerian State owns the petroleum resources both onshore and offshore. Inherently and historically the 36 "provincial" States of the Nigerian federation are pure administrative units created by the Nigerian State at different historical times essentially to achieve "unity in diversity" and can only be referred to as 'federal units' and not 'federating units' as erroneously implied. The conception and reference to the States where petroleum resources are explored and produced, as "oil producing states" is not only fluid but also misnomer. The only oil producing state in Nigeria is the Nigerian State, which wholly invested in its exploration and production to date" (Chafe 2014).

5.3 Why an Educated Citizenry Counts

Most of the vices that are uncommon globally, which however has caused and continue to cause Nigerians much grief are tied to regional and ethnic loyalty promoted by the political elites and politicians in general, as described by many studies (Kari 2018). More recently, since the 1999 establishment of the current presidential system of government and elections modeled after the United States political system, religious differences were added to the equation.

While many criticize the average northern Nigerian for his inability to form strong alliances, groups and associations to confront the 'other' countering regional forces in politics in the name of its region, more importantly however, it is the same strong regional alliances strategy by other contending forces against northern interests that, most times form negative minded mob action that is destroying the country (Usman 2014). The recent IPOB crisis clearly demonstrate that. It is the lack of information and knowledge necessary for positive nation building politics where the citizen is

motivated towards acting right based on credible knowledge that actualized the destruction we saw and continue to see. The scholar Usman believes ignorance allows selfish and criminal minded adults to manipulate unsuspecting crowds by misleading them through the press and more recently social media. In other studies also the scholars (Elue & Ekanem 2011) observed ‘a critical look at the political problems in the country reveals lack of political education and a high level of illiteracy.’

It has become clear to this writer that in order to arrest the hopelessness and despair holding most of the nation’s citizen, most especially the youths who could be groomed to right the wrongs, an honest education is key. It actually pushed the writer to start researching relevant facts that may form the foundation of sound knowledge upon which the nation may find its way forward almost a decade ago. Since then she has written books (Wada 2010, 2012, 2016) to document that journey.

Along the same line of thinking, a departed torch bearer and academic Dr. Yusuf Bala Usman (Usman 2014) once said “without knowledge, the association the citizen enters into (in democratic politics) is one based on irrational, but no less powerful, instincts of fear, greed, envy, fascination, or hatred. This is because the citizen entering into this association has no rational basis for assessing whether or not it serves his or her interest...” Instead of looking at the reality of how governments serve one’s tangible interests such as a person’s ability to take care of his needs and ensure a stable future for his children, people are forced and led into a blind and unrewarding sense of belonging to a group, right or wrong.

The mindset that if a politician comes from my village, or my religion, etc. that makes all his action right regardless of moral, ethical and material reality, and how it affects everyone including myself, makes no sense anywhere. This meaningless wild goose chase has allowed bloodthirsty criminals to flourish, causing the nation and its people great loses. In short his analysis is ignorance within the citizenry is the grounds for criminal minded people to sow and spread fear, envy and hatred.

Within the same speech, Dr. Usman also added that in Nigeria, it’s “...politics is built on the dissemination of ignorance about how Nigeria and its people have come into being. It is the Yoruba Race, the Ijaw Nation, the Igbo Nation ... which has come to riddle Nigerian politics and allow racist and fascist politics deeply hostile to democracy, to flourish.”

5.4 On the Past Derailments

As presented earlier, three preceding occurrences that spell doom for Nigeria, were what set the precedence for restructuring debate. The first of them, rotational

presidency was not meant for nations, but for councils such as those of the United Nations [Security Council] and the European Union. Both are clearly made up of various nations, not a single nation. The rotation serves a specific purpose for a short duration only in each of the two instances; six months term for council presidency of the European Union, and monthly term for the UN Security Council. Rules 18-20 of the Provisional Rules of Procedure govern the procedural aspects regarding the monthly term presidency of the Security Council.

Rotational presidency was not meant to be imposed on sovereign nations because it makes nonsense of the fundamental idea of democracy where majority opinion leads, and one man one vote guarantees the establishment of the most popular mandate of the people. It also negates various key issues and rights the nation's constitution guarantees for its citizens.

Even for such councils, *The Economist* recently took a poke at EU's rotating presidency in its editorial, comparing it to Mobutu Sesse Sseko's irrelevant six months cabinet reshuffles just 'to show who was boss.' Also adding on its inefficiency 'the greater cost is to the quality of EU lawmaking. Some countries that take up the presidency lack the diplomatic experience and political clout to broker agreements.'

Table 1. The Lack of Legal Status for Past Conferences

	GLOBALLY AD- OPTED SYSTEM	LEGISLATION/ REFERENDUM HELD	CONSTITUTIONAL
ROTATIONAL PRESIDENCY - 1999	NO	NO	NO
THIRD TERM CONF. ATTEMPT – 2006	NO	NO	NO
NATIONAL CON- FERENCE 2014	NO	NO	NO

Because Rotational Presidency was not repealed or hotly challenged successfully, the same administration that benefited from it, the Obasanjo Administration then unsuccessfully sought to perpetuate itself through another scheme popularly known as 'third term agenda.' Acknowledging it as a tenure elongation scheme, another scholar describes what happened (Singer 2006) when the agenda on resource control almost

derailed the conference when its agitators realized delegates were not willing to raise 'their current 13% of revenues to more than 17%.

The next scheme, very similar to the failed third term from the Obasanjo era was hatched for similar perpetuation in power by the Jonathan Administration and tagged National Confab 2014. It was also established in violation of the provisions of the constitution, and in true knowledge and existence of elected representatives empowered by law to discuss such issues, i.e. the National Assembly [both senate and house of representatives]. It was described (Hon 2017) as "flawed in several other respects [such as]: no support from the national assembly or senate, delegates handpicked (by Jonathan), no impartial monitors, no pre-set and limited agenda, and no guarantee of, or even specific provision for, implementation."

6. Reforms media need to promote

The survey conducted by this study points at different key priorities that the citizens want to see discussed and implemented after being given the required attention by the media. These include strategies for poverty eradication which scored 33%, reduction of social ills and criminal activities such as civil kidnapping 30% and militant activities by Boko Haram 18%. Nigeria's case is aptly described as poverty in the midst of plenty. The country is crude oil rich, yet poverty as an issue got the highest priority score for both questions posed as the most critical issue, and also what the respondents want the media to set discussion and debate agenda on. Though corruption and lack of accountability for public funds, made worse by a weak judiciary are chiefly to blame for most of the nation's economic woes, positive media framing and agenda setting roles could catapult the issues to the main stream to be dealt with.

Other Issues frequently tabled by analysts but not picked up adequately by the media include:

- ✦ Taking charge of oil exploration, production and refinement domestically
- ✦ Establishment of a viable National Carrier (Airways)
- ✦ Stopping the importation of refined crude and other petrochemical products
- ✦ Resuscitating Nigeria's ailing industries handicapped by cheap imports
- ✦ Imbibing entrepreneurial skills and sense within the populace
- ✦ Strengthening and supporting the entire agricultural value chain as against past 'fertilizer' distribution charade that boosts production only.

As media effect theory has documented through the various studies presented in this paper, the Nigerian media will do best in holding up its social responsibility role by placing some of the critical areas listed above on the agenda so the Nigerian economic and social life will be greatly improved. Positive agenda setting and framing will facilitate the necessary discussion and policy making that will aid such causes. Diversionary tactics away from the critical to mundane, fueled by politicians will not augur well for the nation. It has so far dwarfed the potential of a great nation.

7. Recommendations and conclusion

This study recommends that the media turn its attention to positive agenda setting and framing of critical 'national' not 'sectional' and 'special interest' agenda. Press freedom guaranteed by the constitution in any democratic society is meant to serve the people and the system. The system in turn depends on established democratic structures, one of which is the legislature, whose members are elected to represent the whole population equitably. Any attempt by special interests, or in conjunction with a sitting president to circumvent those structures and throw the nation into lawlessness and chaos should be rejected by the media.

It is vital for the media to hold on to its ethical code of social responsibility. Doing so has the potential to catapult the nation towards the much required peace needed for credible development. If other similarly situated countries that also underwent colonial experience were able to overcome their challenges and develop a strong unitary economy, with one such as Saudi Arabia building 'the world's largest oil and gas company by revenue' in the hundreds of billions, Nigeria has no excuse not to push ahead in such united fashion.

References

- Asogwa, Chika, and Asemah, Ezekiel. 2012. "News Commercialization, Objective Journalism Practice and the Sustenance of Democracy in Nigeria." *Higher Education of Social Science* 3(2): 27-34.
- Ayodele, Olumuyiwa. 1988. "Objectivity, Sycophancy and the Media Reality in Nigeria." *Africa Media Review* 3(1): 106-120.
- Dauda, Sharafa. 2011. 'Mass Media and Society in Nigeria.' *Daily Trust*, March 13, 2011. <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/news/others/mass-media-and-society-in-nigeria/89252.html>

- Fairhurst, Gail, and Robert Sarr. 1996. *The art of Framing*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Gill, Kathy. 2017. "Definition of the Fourth Estate." *Thoughtco*. March 26, 2017. <https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-the-fourth-estate-3368058>
- Hon, Sebastine. 2017. "Imperatives for Lasting Constitutional Restructuring of Nigeria." *This Day*, July 4, 2017. <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2017/07/04/imperatives-for-lasting-constitutional-restructuring-of-nigeria/>
- Ibrahim, J. 2016. "Return of the National Conference Debate." *Daily Trust*, July 4, 2016. <http://www.dailytrust.com.ng/news/monday-column/return-of-the-national-conference-debate/153715.html#P5FVtaG05ZWT7sYi.99>
- Kari, Abubakar. 2018. "The Nigerian Media and the Challenge of Objective Reporting in a Conflict-Ravaged Polity." *The Frontiers News*, January 20, 2018. <https://www.frontiersnews.com/the-nigerian-media-and-the-challenge-of-objective-reporting-in-a-conflict-ravaged-polity/>
- Kosicki, Gerald, and McLeod, John. 1990. "Learning from political news: effects of media images and information-processing strategies." *Mass communication and political information processing*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 69–83.
- Lang, Kurt et. al. (1981). 'Watergate: An exploration of the agenda building process.' *Mass communication review yearbook*, 447-468. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- McCombs, Maxwell, and Donald Shaw. 1972. The Agenda-Setting Function of Public Media. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 36(2): 176–187.
- McQuail, Denis. 1994. *Mass Communication Theory: An introduction*, New York, NY: Sage Publications.
- Neuman, Russel, Just Marion, and Crigler, Ann. 1992. *Common knowledge. News and the construction of political meaning*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Ogih, Mathew. 2017. "Restructuring Nigeria; Meaning, Reasons, Problems and Prospects." *InfoGuideNigeria*, October 10, 2017. <https://infoguidenigeria.com/restructuring-nigeria/>
- Olumide, Ekanade. 2010. 'Nigeria Military Regimes and Policy of Resource Allocation, 1966-1993' *Nigeria at Fifty: Challenges of Nation Building*. Zaria: A.B.U. Press.
- Osahon, Naiwu. 2010. "The Nigerian Disaster Called Obasanjo" *Sahara Reporters*, October 17, 2010. <http://saharareporters.com/2010/10/17/nigerian-disaster-called-obasanjo>
- Provisional Rules of Procedure, *The Repertoire*, A United Nations Publication. Retrieved online at <http://www.un.org/en/sc/repertoire/rules/overview.shtml#rule4>
- "Restructuring Nigeria: A Critical Analysis." 2017. *ThisDay*, June 11, 2017. <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2017/06/11/restructuring-nigeria-a-critical-analysis/>
- Scheufele, Dietram. 1999. "Framing as a theory of Media Effect." *Journal of Communication*, 49: 103-122.

- Scheufele, Dietram. 2000. "Agenda setting, priming, and framing revisited: Another look at cognitive effects of political communication." *Mass Communication & Society*. 297-316.
- Soibi, Max-Alahilbo. 2008. *Obasanjo's Failed Third Term Bid: An analysis of selected newspapers and magazines*, Unpublished Thesis, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
- "Stop the Music: EU's Rotating Presidency." 2016. *The Economist*. Jan 7, 2016. <https://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21685454-every-six-months-council-european-union-gets-new-president-recipe>
- Singer, Ron. 2016. "The State of Nigerian Democracy." *Open Democracy*, https://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-africa_democracy/nigeria_3177.jsp#
- Tuchman, G. 1978. *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality*. New York, NY: The Free Press.
- Usman, Yusuf. 2014. "Ignorance, Knowledge and Democratic Politics in Nigerian" *Beyond Fairy Tales: Selected Historical Writings of Yusuf Bala Usman*. Kaduna: M. O. Press and Publishers, 210-219.
- Wada, Hadiza. 2017. "Nigerian Recession: Strategies for Northern States Revenue Generation" A conference paper delivered at Kaduna State University, March 8-9, 2017.