

# Newspaper Framing of President Buhari's Handling of Insecurity in Nigeria January 2016 – December 2017

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**Abstract:** *It is the primary responsibility of every responsible government to secure/protect the lives and properties of its citizens. Pursuant to the above and in keeping with his campaign promise to Nigerians in 2015, President Muhammadu Buhari upon assumption of office, initiated some measures aimed at combating insecurity in Nigeria. But before then, Nigerians have had their fair share of security challenges and its attendant corrosive and destructive effects across all the geopolitical zones that make up the country. Consequently, the citizens became conscious of any news on insecurity. And in order to live up to their watchdog function, the media, nay, newspapers positioned themselves at the forefront of providing the much-needed information on security threats, including government's efforts to tackle them. No doubt, there have been studies on insecurity in Nigeria. But it is worrisome that while some of those studies focused on the activities of Boko Haram and other violent groups in Nigeria; the others centred on the role of newspapers in the fight against insecurity. This study is a departure from those that studied the "activities of insurgents" and those that investigated the "role of newspapers..." to that of "newspaper framing." Thus, using the content analysis approach to research, this study examined the newspaper framing of President Buhari's handling of insecurity in Nigeria between the period of January 2016 and December 2017. With the objectives of determining the tone and sources of news frames for reporting President Buhari's handling of insecurity in Nigeria; three national dailies, namely: Daily Sun, The Nation and The Daily Leadership newspapers were purposively selected, wherein the study systematically sampled a total of 732 editions of the selected newspapers. The study found out that the selected newspapers used neutral tone and government sources in framing President Buhari's handling of insecurity in Nigeria. It therefore recommended among other things that Nigerian newspapers should improve their investigative reporting efforts.*

**Keywords:** *Framing, Insecurity, Newspapers, Nigeria*

## I. Introduction

Insecurity is a universal phenomenon entrenched in all human socio-political affairs. There is hardly any country that does not experience insecurity in one form or the other. Security challenges can be militancy, insurgency, terrorism, banditry, political violence, ethnic clashes, armed robbery, murder, among others. These

can negatively affect a country's investment profile, lead to loss of lives and property and generally engender an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty. According to Pate and Haruna (2015), insecurity causes social dislocation, population displacement, under-development, loss of lives and property, deepening hunger and poverty, and dehumanization of women, children and the vulnerable. Thus, countries and their leaders invest huge resources to combat insecurity and ensure that their people live in relative safety.

In recent times, Nigeria has found herself in the throes of insecurity, threatening the foundation of the nation. Omede and Omede (2015) argued that there has been an upsurge in kidnapping and abduction, armed robbery, bombing, ethnic conflicts and other forms of carnage in Nigeria. The situation has heightened fear and anxiety such that Nigeria is seen as one of the most unsafe countries in the world. Daniel and Kwopnan (2018) observed that Nigeria is at the verge of collapse, if the spate of insecurity continued unchecked.

During the 2015 presidential campaign, the candidate of All Progressives Congress (APC), Muhammadu Buhari, campaigned on three major planks: corruption, security and economy. Buhari was always telling Nigerians that insecurity, corruption and the economy were the cardinal problems of Nigeria. He promised to lead the war against insecurity from the front in an effort to combat terrorism and then assured Nigerians of his readiness to pay attention to the welfare of security forces, improve their intelligence-gathering capacity, provide them with modern arms and ammunitions and monitor the nation's borders to choke illicit financial and ammunition flow. He equally promised to initiate a comprehensive economic development by promoting infrastructural development, job creation, agriculture and industry to reduce insecurity. Also, the All Progressives Congress (APC), President Muhammadu Buhari's political party, in its manifesto in 2014, vowed to re-tool the security forces by paying adequate attention to their welfare, arming them with modern and sophisticated weapons, re-training them and amending the constitution to accommodate state and local government police.

In times of security challenges, newspapers play important roles of keeping surveillance, framing and analyzing news to help citizens to make informed and responsible decisions in a complex information saturated world (Khalid and Ahmed, 2014). Therefore, the citizens rely on the newspapers to satisfy their information needs. Newspapers publish and provide analysis to varied kind of news to inform, educate, warn and enlighten the public. As soon as President Buhari was inaugurated in 2015, the media especially newspapers gave sustained reports on the campaign against security challenges using different perspectives. There were reports on the worsening security challenges, changes in the military, deployment of the military across the country, military invasion of Sambisa Forest, among others.

One of the reasons that insecurity attracts a lot of newspaper attention in the contemporary world is that insecurity has corrosive and destructive effect on nations and their people. Insecurity has the capacity to pull down a government; it can lead to massive destruction of lives and property; and, security challenges can cause the economy to crumble. Any effort to either check or eliminate security challenges becomes of great interest to newspaper consumers because the public hardly gets information directly from the frontline of conflicts. They rely on the newspapers to guide them to have proper understanding of insecurity. Studies (Obaje, 2017; Onwuzuruigbo, 2017; Ezeah and Emmanuel, 2016; Olomjobi, 2017) in insurgency and violence tend to confirm that public response to insecurity is largely determined by the way the media frame insecurity. Consequently, Media consumers want to know the causes of insecurity, how they can be safe from conflicts and what the government is doing to eliminate it and this information can only be provided by the media. So news about insecurity is always a hot-sale.

## **II. Statement of the Problem**

Since the return to democracy in 1999, Nigeria has been confronted with a rise in insecurity. Nigerians have lived in fear of militant attacks, kidnapping, insurgency, terrorism, ethnic clashes and others. The situation has made Nigeria to be the focus of media attention.

Although there have been studies on insecurity in Nigeria, this study is a departure from the usual studies which center on the activities of insurgents and other violent groups in Nigeria. Many Studies on insecurity in Nigeria have explored the role the newspaper played in reporting aspects of insecurity such as Boko Haram, terrorism, farmers /herders clashes, IPOB, etc. However, there appears to be very few studies on newspaper framing of President Buhari's handling of insecurity in Nigeria. This paper therefore, fills that observed study gap by examining how newspapers framed President Buhari's handling of insecurity in Nigeria.

### **III. Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of this study is to examine newspaper framing of President MuhammaduBuhari's handling of insecurity in Nigeria. But the specific objectives are to:

1. find out the tone used by newspapers in framing President Buhari's handling of insecurity; and,
2. find out the sources of news reports on President Buhari's handling of insecurity in Nigeria.

### **IV. Literature Review**

Insecurity affects both the developed and developing countries. There is hardly any country that does not experience insecurity in one form or the other. Therefore, each country defines insecurity based on the nature and complexion of the crisis it is facing. However, insecurity is better understood when it is placed side by side with security (Obi 2015). Katsina (2012) submitted that even within the same community, perceptions about security vary. Katsina (2012) further opined that mainstream writers conceptualized security in terms of state's capacities to protect its territorial integrity from threats, real or imagined, as well as acts of aggression from potential enemies. Brooks (2010, p.2) cited Fisher and Green (2004) as saying that, "security implies a stable, a relatively predictable environment in which an individual or group may pursue its ends without disruption or harm and without fear of such disturbance or injury." The pivot of the argument here is that the armed forces and other security agencies are the major requirements necessary to ensure the protection of lives and property in a given territory.

Therefore, countries spend heavily on security personnel and military hardware. It is, thus, the protection of a nation and its people through the exercise of the authority of the armed forces. Malasowe (2016) agreed that this approach is militarist where security is defined in terms of physical force, ability to ward off threats or wage war. Consequently, countries spend a large percentage of their budget to train and equip their security agencies to secure their citizens and property.

Over the years, the traditional definition of security has changed as a result of the post- cold war era because it did not take cognisance of non-military threats such as unemployment, poverty, diseases, injustice, population explosion, environmental pollution, resource control, economic deprivation and other variables which can trigger off insecurity (Malasowe, 2016). Experts today see a link between security and leadership, good governance, economic development, equity and equality and provision of basic infrastructure. Katsina (2012) posited that conventional militaristic approach of the cold war era to security failed to stem the tide of insecurity around the globe. However, in the present day, security is defined as the capacity of a country to protect itself from threat and aggression through the deployment of the arsenal of good governance, good economic policies, equity and fairness with a combination of military prowess.

Babangida (2012) outlined some of the indicators of the nexus between security and sustainable economic development to include food sufficiency, good road network, quality health care, good pipe-borne water, effective public transportation, good housing, and quality education, among others. This implies that if the political class fail to manage the economy well, provide employment and if they distort the political structure, sometimes for their selfish gain, the country may become ungovernable because there will be upsurge

in insecurity. Presently threats to a country's security are mainly internally generated threats as a result of lack of social cohesion and economic development. The extent to which there is good governance, economic and social well-being determines the extent of peace enjoyed by a country. The United Nations Development Programme (1994) confirmed that security is safety from chronic threats such as hunger, disease, and repression as well as protection from sudden and harmful disruptions in the patterns of daily life- whether in homes, in jobs or in communities. It can be said that security is any action aimed at ensuring the protection and happiness of the people or community using the ambit of the law of the country.

Achumba, Ighomereho and Akpor-Robaro (2013) noted that security does not represent total absence of threats and fear. But security is the ability to confront security challenges frontally and strategically. So, a nation is considered secure when the government, through good governance, good economic policies and military power has the capacity to tackle its internal and external security challenges. Therefore, even with the best trained security personnel and most sophisticated ammunitions, a country will still be faced with serious insecurity if the political leaders renege in their responsibility to provide good governance and economic equity, fairness and justice. The absence of security safety nets will lead to increase in security threats in the country. Insecurity is people's relative feeling of the presence of economic, political, social, cultural and psychological fear. Onoja (2014) was of the view that economic insecurity breeds other forms of insecurity. The constituents of economic insecurity include the absence of job, basic health care, accessible drinking water, education, life enhancing opportunities and creative policies that cater for short, medium and long term needs of the citizens. The government should always initiate policies that enhance national interests and ensure that individually and collectively, the nation is protected from aggression and, the freedom and wellbeing of the citizens are protected.

With the return to democracy in 1999, there was an increase in the use of violence by Nigerians to express their disenchantment with the way Nigeria was being managed (Nwagboso, 2012). The Niger Delta crisis, championed by Movement for Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) and Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), is a direct rejection of the mismanagement of the oil resources and the underdevelopment of the "Ijaw nation." The Movement for Actualisation of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) surfaced as a protest at the exclusion of the Igbos from the mainstream of Nigerian affairs. Kidnapping gradually became an alternative business for young people who have watched with dismay the affluent lifestyle of politicians. Boko Haram is a response to the grinding poverty in Northern Nigeria. The herdsmen /farmers clashes are a result of the government's abandonment of its responsibilities of having a definite policy on the protection of communities. These groups and others pose serious danger to national security in Nigeria as their activities escalate, causing ethno-religious crises in Jos, vandalisation of oil installations in the South-South, massive robbery in South-West, kidnapping in the South-East and heinous killing/bombing of innocent Nigerians in Northern Nigeria (Adebakin and Raimi, 2012; Nwagboso, 2018). Across the country, armed robbery, banditry, assassination and cattle rustling reached an all-time peak. The situation almost brought the country to a dangerous point where Boko Haram had occupied virtually every part of North- East of Nigeria. In other parts of the country, Nigerians live in palpable fear of kidnappers, armed robbers, bandits, cattle rustlers, assassins and others.

## **V. Theoretical Framework**

### **Framing Theory**

Media framing theory is a media effect theory which examines media impact on consumers. It is an off-shoot of agenda setting theory which has its foundation in the concept that an issue, event, object is subject to a variety of perspectives which has implications for multiple values or considerations (Chong & Druckman, 2007). De Vresse 2005; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Scheufele, 1999 agreed that in media framing theory, framing is a deliberate news production and interpretation engaged by the media and audience respectively. It

rests on the argument that the media subject news stories to their own interpretations by choosing perspectives to adopt in writing or telling the news stories. As part of the process, the media perspectives presented influence how the audience understand, interpret and form opinions about social issues. Ndinojuo, Ihejirika and Okon (2020) concluded that the media framing occurs when journalists select, omit and emphasize certain attributes of news over others.

So, the relevance of the framing theory here lies in the ability of the newspapers to put the issues of insecurity in their proper perspectives, so as to enable the public (Nigerians) to make informed decisions.

## **VI. Research Design**

This study adopted content analysis format as the research design. It is a popular method in communication research with the main objective of understanding the pattern of newspaper framing of President Muhammadu Buhari's handling of Insecurity in Nigeria. Macnamara (2005) noted that content analysis is used to study a wide range of texts from transcripts of interviews and discussions, news stories, editorials, advertising in newspapers, in clinical and social research to the narrative style and form of films, television programmes, etc. Our choice of content analysis method was informed by the fact that content analysis is an appropriate research tool to determine the directions in communication contents of newspapers, their reportage of local, national and international events, editorial and corruption news.

### **Population of the study**

Population of the study consists of issues of *The Nation*, *Daily Sun* and *Leadership* newspapers published and circulated in Nigeria between January 1, 2016 and December 31, 2017 (24 months). The total population amounted to 2193 copies of the three selected national dailies. This means that each of the newspapers had 731 editions in the two years under review. It is important to note that there were 366 (three hundred and sixty-six days) in 2016 since it was a leap year.

### **3.3 Sample Size and Sampling Technique**

Assessing all the contents of all the national dailies on newspaper framing of President Muhammadu Buhari's handling of insecurity was impossible. For this reason, three national dailies were purposively chosen. The selected newspapers are *The Nation*, *Daily Sun* and *Leadership*. From the three selected national dailies, a total of 732 editions from the entire population (2193 editions) of *The Nation*, *Daily Sun* and *Leadership* were selected, with the aid of a constructed calendar, through systematic random sampling to constitute a representative sample of the issues published during the period of study.

In this work, the systematic random sampling approach started from the 1<sup>st</sup> day of January 2016. The 4<sup>th</sup> day of January was selected leaving a three day interval. The next issue selected was 7<sup>th</sup> January, a three day interval was left and it ran continuously till December 31<sup>st</sup> 2017. From the systematic random sampling adopted, each newspaper had 244 editions between January 1, 2016 and December 31, 2017. This technique (systematic random sampling) is systematic; it is not based on probability or accidental.

### **3.4 Instrument for data collection**

This study used coding scheme in which the various categories of the issue and their units of analysis were designed and given nominal value in a code sheet. Items which were included in the coding sheet were frame types, story placement, dominant frames, news sources, story size among others. The coding scheme contained a coding guide which was used to train the coders to assist them in recording the frequency of occurrence and percentages of the various units of analysis.

**Content categories**

The content categories used in this study included Straight news, editorials, features , interviews and columns/opinions in the presentation of news stories on insecurity by the selected newspapers.

**Units of analysis**

**Direction:** This refers to the position held by the studied newspapers on security challenges expressed through their editorials. It is usually reflected in whether the newspapers are neutral, favourable, or against President Buhari’s handling of insecurity.

**Favourable:** Boydston, Gross, Resnik and Smith (2013) suggest tracking of tone frame of texts- positive, negative and neutral frames. In the use of positive tone, the newspapers believe that the government should be praised for their efforts to check insecurity.

**Neutral:** In neutral frame, the newspapers neither praise nor condemn the government efforts at fighting insecurity in Nigeria.

**Unfavourable Frame:** Negative frame portrays the efforts of the government at combating insecurity in a non-sympathetic or negative light.

**News sources:** News source refers to the person who originated the news. It is the person who gave the journalists information about the news. It can be the government, insurgent/ perpetrator, informant, security agents, investigation, etc.

**VII. Data Presentation and Analysis**

**Research question 1:** What tone did newspapers use in framing President Buhari’s handling of insecurity in Nigeria?

**Table 1: Direction/tone of newspaper coverage of President Buhari’s handling of security in Nigeria**

Newspapers	Favourable		Unfavourable		Neutral	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
The Nation	35	8.66	10	2.48	109	26.98
Sun	40	9.9	20	4.95	71	17.57
Leadership	32	7.92	12	2.97	75	18.56
Total	107	26.9	42	10.4	255	63.12

Data in the above table revealed that most of the stories 255(63.1%) reported by the selected newspapers on President Buhari’s handling of insecurity in Nigeria during the period of the study were neutral in direction. The *Nation* newspaper had 35 (8.66%) favourable news, 10 unfavourable news representing 2.48%, and 109 neutral news representing (26.98%). The *Sun* newspaper had 40 favourable news representing (9.9%), 20 unfavourable news representing (4.95%) and 71 neutral news representing (17.57%). *Leadership* newspaper had 32 favourable news representing (7.92%) 12 unfavourable news representing 2.97% and 75 neutral news representing (18.56%). It is evident from the table that 255 (63.1%) stories were neutral in reporting of President Buhari’s handling of insecurity in Nigeria.

**Research question 2:** What are the sources of news reports on President Muhammadu Buhari’s handling of insecurity in Nigeria?

**Table 2: Sources of news reports on President Buhari’s handling of insecurity in Nigeria**

Units of analysis	Newspapers			Total	Percentage
	The Nation	Sun	Leadership		
Military /government	89	77	74	240	59.4
Security experts	9	5	4	18	4.46
International organization	5	2	3	10	2.48
Civil society groups	8	5	4	17	4.21
Religious leaders/ Traditional rulers	19	17	21	57	14.11
Journalists	6	4	4	14	3.47
Others	18	21	9	48	11.88
<b>Total</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>404</b>	<b>100</b>

From the above table which analysed sources of newspaper reports on President Buhari’s handling of insecurity in Nigeria, it was revealed that 240 news stories amounting to 59.4% of the stories analysed were military/government sources. Other sources include security experts 18(4.46%), international organisation 10 (2.48%), civil society groups 17(4.21%), religious leaders/ traditional leaders 57 (14.11%), journalists 14 (3.47%) and others 48 (11.88%).

### VIII. Discussion of Findings

**Research question 1:** What tone did newspapers use in framing President Buhari’s government policy on handling of insecurity in Nigeria?

Findings from the analyses indicated that the selected newspapers were neutral in their direction in reporting President Buhari’s handling of insecurity in Nigeria with 225 news stories representing (63.12%). This means that Nigerian press portrayed the handling of insecurity by President Buhari in a neutral direction. The

neutral direction of issues reported by the selected newspapers implies that the Nigerian newspapers were merely reporting government's actions in straight news format without any form of investigation. In line with this, Ndinojuo, Ihejirika and Okon (2020) advised that Nigerian newspapers should reduce the number of negative frames in their stories; encouraging them to couch their reports with government successes. This is because Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and religious country where issues such as insecurity can easily have ethno-religious labels. However, the neutrality of the selected newspapers on security issues questions the independence of the media in Nigeria. Nigerian government has been accused of controlling and suppressing the media using obnoxious laws/policies. The media also have been accused of romancing the government to gain one favour or the other from them; and this goes against journalism ethics.

This contrasts with the study conducted by Chioma and Ojomo (2015) entitled *Television webcast framing of the Nigerian government's response to Boko Haram insurgency in North- East Nigeria*. The work revealed that Aljazeera and CNN, international media organisations, were very critical of Nigerian government handling of insecurity at a proportion of 50.8 and 66.7% respectively. International media and journalists do appreciate the intricate political and developmental challenges of Nigeria. But framing government's efforts at combating insecurity in Nigeria in a neutral/favourable direction may be seen as a part of local newspapers' social responsibility, an attempt to shield the nation from fear and uncertainty of escalating insecurity.

**Research question two:** What are the sources of news reports on President Buhari's handling of insecurity in Nigeria?

Findings revealed that majority of the sources 240 (59.41%) were generated from military/government officials thereby making the reports lack credibility; newspapers relied heavily on military/government officials' briefings, interviews and press releases for security reports. This confirms Ndinojuo, Ihejirika and Okon (2020) position that newspapers pandered towards the military because the sources of news about military operations against extremist elements were military/government. Epkins (2011) argued that when the media excessively depend on official sources, they become unidirectional in their source choice thereby serving mostly as mouthpieces for government's rehearsed platitudes. He concluded that an unquestioned adoption of a government-spawned frame has negative impact on the public well.

As argued in literature, the best way to ensure that a news story is fair, balanced and informative in journalism practice is to have more than one voice. Using multi- sources not only authenticate or verify stories, but also provide multiple perspectives to the story, and are also important in conflict reporting so that the publics are provided with accurate information.

Another angle to the dominant use of government sources in news reporting about President Buhari's handling of insecurity is the symbiotic relationship observed between the government and the press; here, the government needs the media to create awareness for government policies and programmes, in return, journalists are granted access to officially verifiable sources of government information. Therefore, newspapers see it as part of their social responsibility to publicise the efforts of the government in checking insecurity. The emphasis on government sources could be seen as a deliberate attempt by these newspapers to use the medium to not just enlighten the public but also to help them (public) manage the fear and uncertainty arising from insecurity.

However, it should be pointed out that when journalists are restricted from theatre of military operations, the public and indeed, the nation are starved of on-the-spot situation of the progress in the war against criminality and violence. According to Ndinojuo (2018), the inability of the Nigerian military to crush insurgency is partly blamed on the limited or non-involvement of the media in military operations. Similarly, Picard (1989, p.7) argued:

The inability of journalists to make contact with individuals with first-hand knowledge and participation in events thus forces journalists to seek substitutes. These substitutes are typically elected or appointed political officials who have little knowledge about the incident but rather have specific policy agendas relating to



terrorism or the conflicts related to the violence.

When the media are denied access to theatres of terrorism and violence, the impact is that the media are compelled to file in unconfirmed reports and military/government press releases; but with guided access to trouble spots, the media may help the government and the military with information about the challenges of the military such as poor funding and inadequate equipment and if the community is in sympathy with criminals, the media can assist to encourage government to listen to the community's grievances and cut off support for violent extremism. Batta, Ashong & Bashir (2013) noted that newspapers provide more depth to the treatment of issues when they syndicate columns, present editorials and deliver in-depth analysis and features. Therefore a more in-depth participating in and framing of the campaign against insecurity by journalists will go a long way to give perspectives to the campaign and encourage a more vigorous fight against the menace.

### **Summary of Findings**

The findings of this study clearly revealed that the three selected national dailies framed President Buhari's government's policy on insecurity in Nigeria in a neutral direction, and that the predominant source of news reports on President Buhari's handling of insecurity in Nigeria was government/military officials

### **Conclusion**

The study revealed that the dominant frame used by the selected newspapers was the government/military frame. Other frames used by the selected newspapers included better funding frame, negotiation frame, amnesty frame, provision of employment/infrastructures frame and violation of Human rights frame. Based on the fore-going , this study concluded that although Nigerian newspapers framed President Buhari's handling of insecurity frequently, the reports lacked depth and did not provide sufficient information on the issue.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations were made based on the findings from this study:

- a) Nigerian newspapers should not limit their news reports to military/government response but should rather adopt more frames that can help to provide more interpretations and solutions to news stories about insecurity.
- b) Nigerian newspapers should also try to lend their voices and give other perspectives when reporting news on government response on insecurity. Nigerian newspapers should uphold the principle of media independence by not allowing the government to cage and make them mouth-piece of the government. They should also not allow personal, political or economic interest to override the truth about government effort to stem insecurity.
- c) Nigerian government should allow the press access to theatres of violence and extremism.

Journalists can be embedded with the military or allowed censored access to theatres of war. When journalists have improved and first-hand access to what the government is doing to reduce security challenges, their reports will have more credibility.

- d) Nigerian newspapers should engage more in investigative journalism, which provides detailed information, and allows people to lead more enjoyable, safer, more profitable or better-informed lives, than relying on routine reports from government quarters.

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