

## Chapter 8

# Newspaper Coverage of the *Boko Haram* Terror Campaign in Nigeria: A Content Analysis of Selected National Newspapers Pre- and Post-2015 General Elections

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Terrorism is one of the leading security challenges in Nigeria. Since 2009, the terrorist group, Boko Haram, is the major group fueling this problem by carrying out terror attacks mostly in the northeastern part of the country. The period between 2014 and 2015 marked the peak of terrorist attacks by the group. This period coincided with the general elections, which saw a transition from one civilian regime to another. Boko Haram menace was one of the pressing issues that voters wanted to be resolved. How did the media frame this problem? A content analysis of three national daily newspapers was conducted to see the newspapers' pattern of Boko Haram coverage shortly before and after the 2015 general elections. The study found a slight difference in Boko Haram's reporting before the elections and after. While most of the frames used in newspapers remained unchanged, the frames reflecting hopelessness began to feature more.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Nigerians struggle with economic hardship, armed insurrection, banditry, kidnapping and robberies. Insecurity joined the fray to make life and living in many parts of the country very close to what Hobbes (1651) describes as nasty, brutish and short. Providing security for life and property has become a challenging task for successive governments. According to the Nigeria Security Tracker (2020), different groups in Nigeria resort to violence to express political, economic and social grievances, for examples, the militant Islamist movement *Boko Haram*'s attacks in the northeast; banditry and violent ethnic clashes in the north-central; killings in farming communities by herdsmen in the middle belt; and militant uprisings in the Niger Delta area are all well documented and everyday occurrences.

Mohammed Yusuf founded *Boko Haram* in Maiduguri, Nigeria, in 2002. Since 2009, it has been led by Abubakar Shekau following the death of Yusuf while in the government's custody. *Boko Haram* has been involved in 2,693 incidents in Nigeria since July 2009 (Global Terrorism Data, 2018) and the death of more than 37,500 people since 2011 (Nigeria Security Tracker, 2020). *Boko Haram* related violence peaked between 2014-2015 (Nigeria Security Tracker, 2020; Dudley, 2019). Between January 1st, 2014 and December 31st, 2015, *Boko Haram* was responsible for 838 terror incidents (Global Terrorism Data, 2018) and an estimated 28,395 deaths (Nigeria Security Tracker, 2020). Incidentally, this period led to the Nigerian general elections of 2015. Security was an important topic in the heated campaigns between contenders and incumbents as both sides fought for votes. Some of the politicians preferred to adopt negative campaign tactics: smearing and attacking candidates' personalities and prominent party figures (Orji, 2015; Fasakin, Oyero, Oyesomi and Okorie, 2017). The prevailing state of insecurity at the time only spurred the public to wish for a government that could proffer a solution. Meanwhile, it was interesting to observe how the mass media's role as agenda setters framed public issues as the elections drew closer.

In an explicit expression of support for the opposition party, *The Economist*, on February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015, published an article titled "*The Least Awful: A Former Dictator is a Better Choice than a Failed President.*" The report highlighted several failings of both the opposition and incumbent presidential candidates; it pointed out other failings of Goodluck Jonathan's administration, naming issues like endemic corruption and incompetence. The article closes by saying that "We are relieved not to have a vote in this election. But were we offered one we would — with a heavy heart — choose Mr. Buhari".

In another article titled "*Bad Luck for Nigeria: A Discredited Ruling Party Faces its Greatest Test Yet*", *The Economist* magazine in the same February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015 edition focuses on the candidacy of the opposition leader and presidential candidate retired

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