

Media Concentration and its Effect on Politics in Nigeria

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Abstract

Regional concentration of news production in ethnically polarised societies can be problematic to democracy and development. A case in point is Rwanda where sections of the news media played an instrumental role in laying the groundwork for and participating in the extermination campaign that led to genocide in 1994. This paper examines the political effect of regional concentration of newspaper production in Nigeria's multi-ethnic and multicultural society to investigate if regional media concentration has weakened, detracted or even strengthened the role newspapers play in the democratic process. Using focus group discussions and content analysis, the study found that the divergent political, economic and historical roots of the press in both news publishing hubs in Nigeria, embedded in the nation's peculiar cultural and political history have manifested in intense rivalry and power struggle between and among newspapers in the hubs. The study recommends the set-up of an independent media watchdog, with powers to monitor and regulate inaccuracies and bias in news reporting.

Keywords: *Newspapers; Politics; Media Ownership; Regional Concentration; Agenda-Setting*

1.0 Introduction

Normatively, the responsibilities of the press include providing a mediating platform through which both government and the governed debate, interact and dialogue (McComb, 2005). The media should serve as the unbiased arbiter within society, mediating between all parties and providing a medium for free and fair expression of ideas, opinions and thoughts (Koicki, 1993). Keane (1991) notes that the media should act in the capacity of a watchdog by monitoring and surveilling the activities of elected political representatives, providing a platform for civic engagement and enabling a means for clarification of issues between the electorate and the elected. All these extrapolations on the media's responsibilities suggest that the press play a catalytic role in society; making reforms possible through the democratic process and in the long-run strengthening democratic institutions and making possible public participation in governance.

These assertions however rest on a range of assumptions about the ways in which media shape society. However, the effect of press on politics, public opinion and democratic processes are divergent and diametrically

opposed. In both old and new democracies, particularly in the latter, there is little consensus about the effect of the press on politics. Even in old democracies, McChesney have argued and rightly so that the American media facilitates government of the few, by the few and for the few. Berelson (1948) have also noted that different kinds of information have different effects on different kinds of people under different kind of conditions. Mass communication research is premised on media effect, yet it seems to be the issue on which there is least certainty and less agreement (McQuail, 1983).

The Nigerian press, similar to the Nigerian society is deeply divided along regional lines. This division is accentuated by media concentration in particular regions and/or in the hands of a few individuals which might disproportionately benefit certain political, regional and economic interests. In many cases, such news media may have been used to protect concerns which could run contrary to public interest. As Coker (1979) has noted, in the Nigerian context, post-independence newspaper concentration in Southern Nigeria has not only been political but has also been a heavily

contested arena in which regions use their newspapers for fierce contestation of political and economic power. Other scholars such as Oso (1991) and Omu (1978) suggest that Nigerian newspapers have been used to perform predetermined agenda-setting roles by which they give certain issues public prominence while ignoring others, as part of a process of deliberately projecting specific viewpoints or advancing the interest of certain regions. This agenda-setting role according to Smyth (1991) is not a neutral exercise that is neither free of owners' bias nor unconnected with regional affinity or political party affiliation.

In its current composition, there are two major regional hubs of newspaper ownership and production in Nigeria- the Lagos/Ibadan hub in the South and the Abuja/Kaduna cluster in the North. As we shall see, the two hubs offer divergent political and ideological characterisations as well as distinct ownership roots. Historically, early concentration of newspapers in the South (Lagos) was due to three main factors. Firstly, Omu (1978) noted that Southern Nigeria was the nerve centre of commercial buoyancy. In particular, Lagos had become so important as a commercial centre that its traders, both Europeans and Africans, were advertising in the *African Times*, published in London. Locally therefore, this availability of advertising revenue provided the necessary fillip for the growth of newspapers in Lagos. Secondly, Babalola (2002) observed that the spread of basic education and literacy had created in Lagos a large pool of educated readers of newspapers. Thirdly, political developments in 1922 and the activities of educated Southerners stimulated the development of political consciousness that transformed into nationalism and independence in 1960.

Nigeria is however a country sharply divided culturally, regionally and politically between the conservative Muslim North and the more culturally heterodox Christian South. Lagos lies in Southern Nigeria and as a consequence, the Lagos press is seen by the nation's political establishment- mainly from the north- as a negative force, constantly antagonistic to successive governments, especially those from the northern geo-political zones of Nigeria. Adamu (2000) notes that the less prominent

Abuja/Kaduna press hub is located in the North and representative of the powerful, aristocratic northern political class. Kukah (1999) adds that the growth of newspaper publishing in Northern Nigeria was to achieve two objectives: the first was to challenge the dominance of the Lagos press, and second, to present news from Northern Nigeria by the people of the North. There was therefore unity of opinion amongst elites from the North, party differences notwithstanding, that the North needed its own national newspaper. This indicated that from the outset *The New Nigerian* newspaper- the first national newspaper from the North- was set up collectively by Northern political elite to challenge the dominance of Southern newspapers on one hand and protect Northern interests on the other.

What is the nature of the relationship between newspaper publishing hubs in Nigeria? Specifically, are Nigeria's regionally concentrated newspaper press hubs conflictual or complementary? More importantly, what is the real harm of geographically or regionally concentrated newspaper ownership and production on politics in Nigeria?

2.0 Nigeria and the great divide

Osaghae (1998) and Ikime (1980) have argued that the roots of Nigeria's post-independence politics, economy and intergroup relations are deeply embedded in its history. Geographically, Nigeria's population is an amalgamation of diverse peoples and cultures. The three main ethnic groups (Hausa- north, Igbo- east and Yoruba- west) had well-organised political and social structures at the dawn of British colonialism of Nigeria in 1900. To the North of Nigeria, two developments had shaped and influenced the region before Britain established its protectorate over the region. First was the long-established Trans-Saharan trade between the Hausa states in Northern Nigeria and North Africa. Second and consequent upon the first was the introduction and spread of Islam by contact with North African traders and scholars and by the Fulani Jihad, launched in 1804 by Uthman Dan Fodio. Consequently, Islam had become the main religion within the region with extensive influence on the culture, politics, military and structure of Northern Nigeria.

To the West of Nigeria are well-established kingdoms- Oyo, Ife and Benin with vast administrative and political territories, stretching as far as modern day Togolese Republic. As observed by Johnson (1921), the decline of Oyo Empire and the subsequent break away of Yoruba city-states from Oyo's dominance led to decades in which the whole region was embroiled in a series of internecine war that continued until arrival of the British. Socially, the advent of and long contact with European traders along the coast and Oil River Protectorate had significantly influenced economic and political life in Western Nigeria. The early adoption of Christianity as well as Western education had created a society in which European style civilisation had become entrenched. To the East of Nigeria were scores of stateless, segmented, decentralised politically independent communities that co-existed within the same region. One distinguishing factor was the cultural, geographical and lingual variations that separated the Igbo, Efik, Ijaw, Annang, Kalabari and other village states within the eastern region. As is the case in the West, the Eastern region was also heavily influenced by Christianity (Catholicism) and Western education.

At independent in 1960, the administrative, economic and political merger was a welding of some sort. The extent of the cultural, religious, economic and political differences between the North and South brought to light the marked imbalances between the regions. The gap in political development, press advocacy, educational differences and economic growth between the two regions had grave consequence for political competition, resource control and socio-economic policy issues since 1960. With the above framework, Nigerian newspapers are somehow recruited for and engrafted in the political, regional and ethnic contestation of state power and resources that have characterised the Nigerian state since independence. The North/South divide in the Nigerian press not only suggest cleavages in the regional centres of newspaper concentration and publication but may also indicate deeper ideological, political and religious differences. Uche (1989) has observed that the post-independence press in Nigeria were largely

means through which their owners competed for, accessed or retained political offices.

Abati (2000) have added that the geographical location of a Nigerian newspaper and the ethnicity of its publisher are keys to understanding its world views and narratives. Azuka (2004) also noted that the press was used to escalate ethnic and regional tension during the 2002 ethnic tensions in Nigeria. Similarly, Ekeanyanwu's (2007) comparative content analysis of Nigerian newspaper coverage and management of political conflict in a pluralistic society between 2003 and 2007 suggested that the Nigerian press operated more as active players in the political crisis and conflict than as an impartial judge. He sums up by noting that regionally biased reporting negatively impacted on the crisis, leading to escalation and violence. Galadima and Enighe (2001) also found that the Nigerian press are often used by their owners for the propagation of their interest, especially in the struggle to gain power or monopolise same.

My analysis starts from the standpoint that this study situates the press in its current democratic dispensation which took off at the end of military rule in 1999 after three decades of non-democratic regimes since the attainment of political independence in 1960. It is noteworthy that 100 years after Nigeria was amalgamated into a single political entity, multi-party elections have never occurred in succession until the commencement of this current political dispensation in 1999. Previous attempts at successive multi-party elections and smooth transition of power through general election proved unsuccessful in 1965, 1983 and 1993. However, since the restoration of civil rule, general elections, sometimes adjudge free and fair have been held in 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015, indicating a degree of democratic consolidation.

The implication of the above is the assertion that the press is now free to perform its constitutionally guaranteed responsibilities, especially in the absence of military rule. This paper therefore examines the political effect of regional concentration of newspaper production in Nigeria's multi-ethnic and multicultural society to investigate if regional media concentration has weakened, detracted or even

strengthened the role Nigerian newspapers play in the democratic process.

3.0 Research Methodology

To collect evidence needed to address the research questions, mixed research methods was adopted. The rationale behind the eclectic methods was dictated by the research objectives. Firstly, I needed to explore the extent to which different regional clusters of newspapers exhibit distinctive correlations with different sorts of news treatment and news selection. Secondly, to confirm the causality of any such correlations, I needed to explore actual social relationships within newspaper organisations, between proprietors, editors and journalists. Finally, to consider the political effects of newspaper content- democratic or otherwise, I needed to find a way of assessing how stories are understood by the people who read newspapers and for this purpose.

Specifically, information was assembled in the following ways- first through 18 Semi-Structured Interviews, and secondly through five Focus Group Discussions. The interviews and discussions were conducted in Lagos and Abuja in Nigeria in May and July 2013. For the purpose of triangulation, content analysis, the third research tool was used to contextualise the interviews and discussions on one hand and on the other hand to investigate if newspapers within and between the two publishing hubs form an editorial axis. Data was gathered from the analysed content of seven Nigerian newspapers (*Punch*, *Tribune*, *Guardian*, *Vanguard* and *ThisDay* in Lagos and *Leadership* and *Trust* in Abuja) each covering six months in the two election years, 2007 and 2011. The justification of the selection of these seven national newspapers was based on three key factors: first, they were national newspapers whose content documented national news and unlike provincial newspapers, were readily available across the country; secondly; the newspapers were familiar to and popular amongst Nigerians; and finally, they (old copies) were accessible and available for the purpose of research.

The selection of 2007 and 2011 as opposed to earlier general elections in 1999 and 2003 was based on three key factors: first, access to

archived newspapers for 1999 and 2003 was very limited; secondly, the number of newspapers published in Northern Nigeria, particularly those with broad and national reportage was limited; as such, there was little basis for comparison between newspapers published to both hubs; thirdly, the shift from authoritarian rule to multiparty elections were in their formative years. Qualitative content analysis of editorial comments was used to study the language of reporting in the construction of narratives to determine the position of particular newspapers on reported national issues. Analysis was undertaken by studying the frequency and prominence of political news and front page content categories.

4.0 Discussion and Analysis

The study found three overlapping effects on politics in Nigeria: (a) news bias and imbalance (b) culture of political intolerance; and (c) elite dominance in the market place of ideas. A broad array of issues is subsumed in these three effects. These include questions on the type of news bias prevalent in Nigerian newspapers? How does news bias affect public perception? What are the effects of political intolerance? And how do the elite dominate the press?

News Bias and Imbalance

News is the central ingredient of the press. Inherent in the concept of news are ideals such as objectivity, neutrality, accuracy, completeness and non-partisanship, all of which increase newspapers credibility and justify relevance to reach broad audiences. The gathering, selection and reportage of news indicate an inherent selectivity in the process. The commission of one (news items) invariably implies the omission of another either deliberately or otherwise. Given the above, the key questions therefore are: does the regional composition in the Nigerian press influence prejudiced reporting? Are Nigerian newspapers balanced, that is; do they report the opinion of dissenting voice and cover all sides of the divide?

Is News Biased against the North of Nigeria?

Table 1: Summary of front page news category according to region

Region	Ethnicity	Election	Presidency	Violence	Corruption	Party politics
South	6%	5%	3%	8%	4%	6%
Abuja	1%	17%	8%	5%	5%	12%
North	4%	2%	1%	7%	1%	4%

Source: Content analysis of seven selected newspapers

As noted in Table 1 above, news reportage of the South and Abuja are substantially more than that of the North. A combination of 81% is devoted to Abuja and the South- Abuja (48%) and South (32%) while the North only receives 19% or less than one fifth (1/5) of total coverage in the selected Nigerian newspapers. Comparatively, the data indicates that the North is not sufficiently reported in the news, and when it is, over one-third of the coverage is dominated by negative news of violence, disaster and poverty. Almost half (40%) of overall coverage for the North is related to violence, especially narratives that boarder on electoral conflicts, ethnic differences and religious unrest. In the South, however, violence-related reportage accounts for less than 25% of total coverage. The South is therefore projected as stable and progressive while the North by implication is framed as a volatile and unsteady region and by consequence, incompatible with investment and stability. Additionally, the South (Positive 8% and Neutral 14%) is projected in more positive light than the North (Positive 5% and Neutral 9%). The South therefore has a higher percentage of overall coverage- 32% compared to the North- 20%.

Table 2 below provides evidence of how Southern newspapers engage in negative press in their reportage of the North and its politicians. It is noteworthy that while *Trust* newspaper in Abuja reported two opposing views- one asserting that Mohammed Buhari (a presidential aspirant from the North) is unfit to rule as remarked by Professor Wole Soyinka; it also included the comment from elements of the PDP affirming that 'Soyinka was entitled to his opinion.' Newspapers in the South (see *Tribune* above) only reported and commented on Soyinka's remarks. In Lagos, *Vanguard* news headline was titled: "Obasanjo, Soyinka slams

Buhari as unfit to rule." Similarly, *Thisday* led with "Soyinka: why we must shun Buhari/Yar Adua because they Lack Credibility and are Corrupt." The "one-sided" headlines suggested that Buhari and Yar Adua (both presidential candidates from the North are incompetent to lead Nigeria).

Table 2: Front page headline of Trust and Tribune

<i>Trust</i> newspaper (Abuja) 16/01/2007 Front page headline: "No way for Buhari-says Soyinka." "He is entitled to his opinion replies PDP."	<i>Tribune</i> newspaper (Ibadan) 16/01/2007 Front page headline: "Buhari not fit to be president of Nigeria" says Soyinka.
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Source: Content analysis

It is difficult to quantify the direct and less obvious linkages between Southern newspaper reportage of Northern Nigeria and the concentration of poverty in that region; however, media stereotype in the description and analysis of the North, especially in the Southern press may have contributed to the dearth of investment and development in the region. When the North is reported, they are mainly negative and positioned conspicuously in the newspaper. For example, *Vanguard* editorial (14/03/2007) captioned: A Nation of Unwilling Leaders: A Political History of Failed Leadership and the Fear of its Continuity" blamed Nigeria's past Presidents and Heads of States (mostly from the North) for Nigeria's socio-economic challenges and alerts Nigerians not to perpetuate the dominance of incompetence. Similarly, *Tribune* front page (25/01/2007) titled: "Buhari and Yar Adua are Not Fit to Rule Nigeria." Both Buhari and Yar Adua are leading Northern politicians with keen interest in becoming President. Arguably, this editorial predisposition is partly the product of regional location and geographic concentration of newspapers. The (often negative) blanket coverage of the North by Lagos-based newspapers is complicated by the inability of northern newspapers to positively project itself by reason of poor circulation volume, mass illiteracy and inadequate social infrastructures all of which impede sustainable newspaper production, distribution and coverage.

Focus Group Discussion further reinforces insights set out above. Most participants agree that newspaper content in Nigeria is manipulated or framed to suit specific regional agenda. A

Punch editor within the discussion group remarked that news is a strategic determiner of information for political, social and economic decision making. Another reporter, with *Tribune* however added that “the owner’s considerations, available resources, commercial concerns and regional factors hold more importance in the day-to-day newsroom decision making than anything else.” While most participants agreed that the first and main responsibility of the press is to the public, a Lagos-based news editor observed that “...the business model as defined by the newspaper owner cannot be overemphasised. The Editorial Board (chaired by the Chairman) normally decides based on the philosophy that is in the interest of the business.”

The above commentary not only reasserts the manifest influence of owners but also raises several questions relating to regional influence. An Abuja editor, commenting on the importance of affinity between regions and the newspapers operating within them asserted that: the most inherent bias is in story selection; a pattern highlighting news stories that coincide with the agenda of a particular political party or region; while ignoring stories that coincides with opposing views.” This places inherent pressure on newspaper editors and complicates the selection and framing process. When asked if newspapers frame issues for regional purposes, participants of Northern origin observed that objectivity is a scarce commodity in Southern papers. Referring to Lagos newspapers, a Northern interview participant commented that “what we see in the papers are conflicting, at times fabricated news pieces. Spin and propaganda have become front page materials. A significant majority, particularly in Lagos asserted that “Northern papers profit through biased regionalised and ethnicised reporting.”

An analysis of newspaper content on “Amnesty for Niger-Delta Militants” declared by the Nigerian Federal Government in 2009 indicate a divergence of opinion between newspapers in Abuja (North) and Lagos (South). Although newspaper commentaries on the Niger-Delta crisis converged in condemning the insurgency and their violent campaign on oil and gas workers and destruction of oil installations and infrastructures (*Guardian*: 10/04/2007;

Thisday: 25/01/2007 and 12/06/2007); the North/South dichotomy in the Nigerian press divided consensus on whether amnesty should be granted to the militants. “Amnesty for Niger-Delta Insurgents” (*Leadership* (front page) 16/06/2011) reported that while peace is essential in the Niger-Delta; the amnesty approach may be hindered by political and logistical challenges. A Lagos-based newspaper (*Thisday* (editorial) 23/06/2011) on its part hailed the decision of the Federal Government to grant amnesty to militants in the Niger-Delta. The divergence of opinion between newspapers in the north and south are not only beyond mere coincidence but are also regionally determined.

The study found that the most common way through which bias manifests itself in news is via word choice, which includes selection or omission of sources, omissions and commission, suggestions and implications all of which limit or expand a narrative or define how an issue is framed. Diction and syntax allow an idea to be established in any number of ways: some are basic, others are luxuriously flamboyant, some reveal secondary thoughts, others betray hidden emotions. In Table 3 below, the front-page lead stories of four national dailies as published on April 19, 2011 are reproduced to demonstrate the slant of reportage of the same issue (outcome of 2011 presidential election) in these newspapers.

Table 3: Comparism of front page headlines in four national newspapers

<i>Leadership</i> in Abuja (19/04/2011). “Jonathan Emerges as Nigeria’s president.”	<i>Vanguard</i> in Lagos (19/04/2011). Post-election Violence as 12 dies. The coronation of Goodluck”
<i>Daily Trusting</i> Abuja (19/04/2011). “Nigerians have Spoken with One Voice. Jonathan is President”	<i>Tribune</i> in Lagos (19/04/2011). INEC Declares Jonathan Winner. Opposition Party Rejects Result. North Boils”

Source: Content analysis of selected newspapers

In all four newspapers, the lead stories are iterating the same piece of information- the election of Jonathan Goodluck as the President of Nigeria. Importantly however, the decision concerning syntax and diction, and what further information is added (as in the above example in *Vanguard* and *Tribune*, the two southern papers) can lead to sentences being so altered from the basic idea that the same exact event can be depicted in two fundamentally different ways. In Table 3 above, the use of “post-election violence” and “opposition party reject results”

would have impacted the way readers interpreted the articles. A Focus Group Two participant in the North (Abuja) commented that:

What we (North) experience is a blackout of positive news due to a conflict of interest in the Southern press. Whether it is the media, the Southern elites or Southerners in general; it appears that that part of Nigeria prefer to report and read negatives about the North. Most of the news in the Southern media is misrepresenting and deforming Northern culture.
(Anonymous (2013) Focus Group Discussion comment)

A Focus Group 2 participant from the North remarked that *“there is palpable fear of domination in the North where it is believed that a deliberate attempt exists in the South, especially in the South west to exploit the advantages of industrial and economic superiority and establish perpetual political dominion.”* So, the bias that is evident for the content analysis; is conspicuously evident to newspaper readers and journalists. An especially key statement in this section is the admission from an editor that regional affiliations are a key consideration in affecting news selection and story treatment, though southern journalists also drew attention to the diversity of political allegiances within the Southern press. That the perception of the Southern press is perceived as being regionally biased by Northern journalists as well as northern newspaper readers is an especially alarming effect of the way that location of ownership and publication helps to affect political perception of the press’s role.

Culture of Political Intolerance

Political culture is a set of attitudes, beliefs, and sentiments that give order and meaning to a political process and which provide the underlying assumptions and rules that govern behaviour in the political system (Encyclopaedia, 1968) These widely held set of beliefs include concepts of equality of opportunity, liberty, democracy and

individualism that underpin the functioning of a political system. The press, through its mediated and agenda-setting roles are major players in framing issues, constructing and deconstructing national dialogues. In the interviews, when asked what kind of political culture Nigerian's regional press has helped to shape, a journalist with *Trust* in Abuja noted that:

...historically, the press in Nigeria is intolerant- of other religions, colonialism, military dictatorship and of non-Christian ethnic groups! The press in the South particularly, through their reporting have overtime “demonised the North politically and culturally.
(Anonymous (2013) Interview comment)

Another Northern participant asserted that *“although there is diversity of ownership within Lagos, their concentration in the South has “created a situation in which the opinions of Northerners are drowned in the ocean of Southern perspectives. An Abuja reporter believed that the agenda of “the Lagos press is to undermine the unity of the North by portraying our region and religion as illiterate, underdeveloped and violent. They speak about the North as if we are all members of Boko Haram sect”* (a radical Islamic fundamentalist group that have claimed responsibility for several bomb attacks in different parts of Northern Nigeria.) While no evidence of the above claim exists in any Southern newspaper, particularly within the sample population analysed for this study; the remark could indicate Northern stereotype of the South.

The popular account seeds resistance through its marginalising of the Northern aspects of the country. We shall need in this analysis to consider whether the North is silenced, or more disturbing, misrepresented in the central narrative. A discernible concern suggests that the South displays superiority tendencies towards the North and its press, expressly manifesting in dominating the media discourse and suppressing the other. A Lagos-based journalist said that:

*Who are the Northern press?
Are they not a few sprinkling
in the over-saturated South-
controlled press? No matter
how Daily Trust and
Leadership try, they will
never get or rather it might
take them a century to get to
the level of credibility and
respect that Guardian or
Punch. (Anonymous (2013)
Focus Group Discussion
comment)*

Other Lagos-based journalist also noted that *newspaper criticism should not necessarily be equated with hatred. In the North, however, any news report that challenges the status-quo or questions authority is deemed as anti-Islam. What follow afterwards is violent demonstrations and conflicts.* Again, three polarised views emerged- the first asserts that the press in the South is intolerant of the North; the second admits that the North is underdeveloped; while the last narrative claims that media criticism ought not be equated with intolerance and detestation.

Antagonism and Intolerance in Newspaper Editorials

Table 4: Percentage of editorial types in selected Nigerian newspapers

Types	Frequency	Percentage
News	44	16%
Tribute	21	8%
Policy	69	26%
Social	75	28%
Special	14	5%
Speculative	42	16%

Source: Content analysis of seven Nigerian newspapers

According to Table 4 above, the two predominant editorial types are Social (28%) and Policy editorials (26%). Together, they constitute (54%); more than half of all editorials. The main thrusts of these editorials (Policy and Social) are economic and development challenges such as insecurity, inflation,

unemployment, corruption, infrastructural inadequacies and ineffective policies that confront the Nigerian state. News and Speculative editorials (32%) combined, represent a third of all editorials.

A further analysis of policy editorials across all seven newspapers indicated an overwhelming anti-government slant in reportage. Although the degree of criticism varied between newspapers in both hubs (Southern newspapers were more assertive and critical), there was no significant difference in the penchant for anti-government sentiments between Abuja and Lagos newspaper editorials. There are strong correlations among Nigerian newspapers and between newspapers in both hubs in their critical editorials- social and policy. This finding resonates with interview and focus group commentaries in which participants agreed that shortages and inadequacies in State performance “compels” newspapers to criticize government at all levels.

Why are social and policy editorials prevalent in the press? There are two logical explanations. Firstly, the tradition of political agitation in the press has long historical antecedents. Political, regional and religious antagonism was synonymous with and interpreted as press vibrancy during the colonial and military eras. This trend has not only endured but has consolidated. Secondly, due to the intricate relationship between newspapers and political parties; editorial criticisms are used to challenge the incumbent administration on one hand with the intention of spreading disaffection on the other. Editorial are not only ideological but also critical. They seek to suggest alternative causes of action that may generate better outcomes on one hand while on the other; they seek to sway public opinion and trust in particular directions. They also oppose government’s policies, actions and inactions in line with adversarial press traditions not peculiar to Nigeria.

Content analysed data indicate that newspaper editorials are not only inherently critical but also sectional. Although such criticism is two prong (government criticism and regional/political antagonism), the latter, more than the former is prevalent. As noted in this section, a culture of ethno-regional motivated criticism, especially between newspapers with

regional affiliations and by politicians with accesses to particular newspapers has perpetuated political intolerance between the two regions as well as within the regions. This is made more obvious by focus group commentaries and interview remarks by participants who assert that over time, the Nigerian political landscape is charged with deep-seated prejudice of the other region.

Elite Dominance in the Market Place of Ideas

The final political effect of regional concentration of newspaper in Nigeria is the monopolisation of the market place of ideas in the interest of a few minority elite. Do newspapers represent the views of the political class? Do publishers represent the interest of certain ethnic groups? Do newspapers portray the opinion of the poor and less privileged? These questions were addressed during our focus group sessions. A significant majority of respondents in Lagos and Abuja agreed that there is a strong relationship between media proprietors and the political class- a bond of symbiotic mutual benefit that enhances the interest of both groups. Group Two discussants in Abuja observed that beyond ethnic and political divides, a web of association exists between newspaper owners, politicians, top civil servants and corporate elites for the sole purpose of sustaining and advancing their privileges. It is noteworthy that a significant number of regional newspaper owners are also politicians with direct interest in public office.

Discussants in Focus Group Three also in Abuja remarked that the real beneficiaries of the Nigerian press are the regional elite who use newspapers for reasserting hegemonic relationships. The ruling class weaves ethnicity and religion with political issues in a bid to gain legitimacy or perpetuate hegemony. A Lagos-based journalist commented that:

Newspapers are the mouthpieces of the regional elite. If you look at the front page, editorial comments and op-eds of most newspapers, it is easy to discern whose interest a particular newspaper is out to protect. Not many newspapers make an effort to conceal their

obvious support for a politician or political party.
(Anonymous (2013) Focus Group Discussion comment)

The study found that beneath the multiple layers of relationship among the regional elites is a shared desire to protect their economic concessions. Through ownership and management structures, corporate sponsorship and political advertisement, newspaper content significantly reflect the bias of their proprietors and their associates. The table below outlines front page news headline of two national dailies- *Vanguard* and *Thisday* over a seven-week period (16/01/07 to 26/02/07) to show the extent to which regional elite news dominate newspaper content.

Table 5: An outline of elite discussion in *Vanguard* and *Thisday*

<p>Vanguard newspaper</p> <p>16/01/07- Obasanjo, Soyinka slams Buhari 25/01/07- Atiku hits Obasanjo afresh 01/02/07- Speed up hearing on Atiku's case- FG tells court 09/02/07- National Assembly Faults Federal Govt on Atiku's deflection to Action Congress 14/02/07- FG bars Atiku not to partake of April's polls 20/02/07- Police recover late Funsho Williams phone 26/02/07- My life in danger- Atiku: hold Federal Government responsible</p>
<p>This day newspaper</p> <p>16/01/2007- Soyinka: why we must shun Buhari, Yar Adua 25/01/2007- Ali seeks Atiku's impeachment. Obasanjo wants to oust Atiku 01/02/2007- Atiku plans to cause unrest in Nigeria 09/02/2007- INEC okays Buhari and others for election 14/02/2007- Oyo Lawmakers are misfits- Masari (Speaker of Federal House of Rep.) 20/02/2007- Funsho Williams phone recovered in the North 26/02/2007- Election screening exercise- Atiku still in the race</p>

Source: Content analysis data

Table 5 above shows the dominance of elite opinion, news and interest in the front pages of two newspapers (*Thisday* and *Vanguard*). The individuals mentioned in the above table are mainly political party leaders, politicians, public office holders and lawmakers with influence in national politics. Alternative voices, if reported, are concealed in the inside pages in most newspapers. There has been a subtle shift in emphasis from general reportage about the welfare of the poor and vulnerable, state of the economy, to political dialogue between and among politicians and political parties who mainly seek alliance for mutual economic benefits and financial gains.

Cases of Elite Discussion in Nigerian Newspapers

Soyinka's Comments and its Reportage in Newspapers- "Soyinka: why we must shun Buhari, Yar Adua" (*Thisday*: 16/01/2007) The paper reports that Nobel Laureate, Professor Wole Soyinka, disparaged the candidature of the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) presidential candidate, General Muhammadu Buhari and his People's Democratic Party (PDP) counterpart, the Katsina State governor, Alhaji Umar Musa Yar'Adua, saying neither of them is fit to be president. He described Buhari as "one ex-ruler that the nation cannot call to order" adding that crimes committed against the polity "must be answered in the public space, not in caucuses of bargaining." Similar headlines featured in *Guardian*, *Tribune* and *Punch* newspapers in the South. In an editorial rejoinder: No way for Buhari- Soyinka, Yar Adua: "He is entitled to his opinion" (*Daily Trust*: 16/01/2007) report that Soyinka's disapproval of Buhari is an academic exercise as the final decision lies with Nigerian who will decide Nigeria's future at the polls." *Punch* editorial rejoinder (*Punch*: 18/01/2007) quotes Prince Tony Momoh (the then information minister during Buhari's rule) asserts that "Soyinka has right to freedom of expression.

Oyo Lawmakers are Misfits- in the South; most newspapers reported the "name-tagging" of Oyo lawmakers by the Speaker of the Federal House of Representative. Oyo is a key State in the Western region. "Oyo lawmakers are soldiers of violence- Masari" (*Punch*: 14/02/2007). The same is reported in *Thisday*: "Oyo lawmakers are misfits- Masari" (*Thisday*: 14/02/2007). In Abuja, *Daily Trust* coverage (14/02/2007) of the issue condemned Oyo State legislators and accused them of non-compliance with the rule of law. The report however glossed over the name-tagging by Masari. In response, several Southern newspaper rejoinders, particularly *Tribune* and *Thisday* (19/02/2007), acknowledged the fracas in the Oyo State House of Representatives but took up issues with Masari's comment, accusing him of insulting the sensibilities and independence of the South. A column titled: "**Masari's thunderous denunciation**" in *The Nation* newspaper (Lagos) captured the mood of most Southern newspapers:

...Now, finally, the rather sedate Speaker of the House of Representatives, Alhaji Aminu Bello Masari, has fiercely denounced the lawmakers of the Oyo State House of Assembly as soldiers of violence and rascality. Does Ibadan still have room to take more insults? (*The Nation* newspaper, (18/02/2007). Pp.

14. Emphasis mine)

Southwest Rascals- "South west rascals' Jonathan under fire (*Thisday*: 10/02/2011); "Nigeria needs more radicals in government- ACN replies Jonathan" (*Nigerian Tribune*: 10/02/2011); "PDP vows to drive rascal Gobs from Lagos" (*Vanguard*: 10/02/2011); and 'South west rascals' Jonathan under fire from Yoruba leaders" (*Punch*: 10/02/2011). 'Southwest Rascals'- Southwest hits back at Jonathan" (*Daily Trust*: 10/02/2011) condemned the president's use of the word "rascal" to describe members of the opposition parties in the Southwest. The paper again in its editorial: *Unedifying Remark- the President Calling Oppositions in the Southwest Rascals* (*Daily Trust*: 17/02/2011) frowns at the use of demeaning words to describe opposition party member in a particular part of Nigeria.

Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) quiz Tinubu- Ex-Governor of Lagos State and leader, Action Congress (AC) political party, Bola Tinubu was invited by EFCC for questioning over allegations of financial misappropriation and corruption during his administration in Lagos. The news was reported in all Southern newspapers. "Tinubu appears before EFCC" (*Punch*: 12/06/2007); "EFCC quizzes Tinubu over fraud, and Nnamani" (*Tribune* 12/06/2007); and "EFCC quizzes Tinubu, Akume" (*Vanguard* 12/06/2006). Reports from the Lagos press however suggested that the move was a calculated attempt by the People's Democratic Party (PDP) led Yar Adua administration to attack Action Congress political party and disrepute the person of Bola Ahmed Tinubu. Although the EFCC neither singled out Tinubu nor attacked his political party; a "conspiracy theory" was

hatched in several follow-up reports in the Lagos press. "The EFCC and ex-Governors" (*Guardian*: 20/06/11) provided comprehensive and objective analysis of the matter.

The general theme in the above cases indicates the prevalence of political editorial and rejoinders in all newspapers, particularly *Daily Trust* and *Leadership*. Three strands of dialogue were identified in the course of the study: firstly, attacks on region or on particular politician caused a thread of regionally defensive outbursts and reactions, whether from the North or South. Secondly, election and re-election of potential candidates or particular parties featured significantly in editorials. Finally, criticism of government performance is viewed by opposing politicians as scoring political points. The social responsibility theory of the press which asserts the media's role as society's watchdog is threatened by compromised autonomy and editorial dependence on proprietors' political affiliations and regional alliances. The direction of reportage and the interpretation of events mainly along political and ethnic lines raise concern. It specifically challenges the fundamental assumption that underpins the concept of mass media. The media, described as the fourth estate of the realm are not expected to be subservient to politicians, religious, regional or cultural cleavages in society state, rather, it is expected that competing power centres, groups and individuals will have free and equal access to newspapers to articulate their views, thus enriching the political process. Evidence in this study indicates significant elite dominance in the market place of ideas has stifled multiplicity of voices and the clash of contending ideas and opinion.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper investigated the political effects of regional concentration of newspaper ownership and production in Nigeria. Using mixed methods, the study found three significant political effects of newspaper concentration in Nigeria. Firstly, regional concentration has led to bias and imbalance in news content and reporting and as a consequence eroding news credibility. Secondly, it has created and perpetuated a culture of political intolerance between the competing factions, regions and

groups within Nigeria. Finally, concentration of newspapers in the North and South of Nigeria has allowed elite dominance in the market place of ideas, thus allowing the agenda of a privileged few to saturate newspaper content, often to the exclusion of competing and alternative ideas. The study found that Nigerian newspapers have at sundry times and in different manners, served as tools in the hands of regional owners, editors and the elite class in contesting political power.

The study's content analysis does indicate that newspapers both in the North and the South can be very critical of government- often- and that they present a diversity of political affiliations. These are the more politically positive outcomes of an ownership structure which is still heavily individualised and in which proprietors often have political affiliations which are sometimes regionally determined. Despite this qualification, in general it is fair to conclude that since 1999, the press is yet to fully engage with the Nigerian public in so far as providing relevant and adequate news with the sole purpose of empowering the public to participate in the political process. The effect of regional concentration of newspaper ownership and production has systematically hindered the pursuit of Nigerian newspaper in protecting the interest of the people.

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