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Newspaper Influence on Public Opinion Formation during Intra-Party Elections in Nigeria: A Discourse Analysis

Samuel George Jacobs
University of Uyo, Nigeria
godsonud@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study investigates the influence of newspaper discourse on public opinion formation during intra-party elections in Nigeria, with specific focus on the 2022 party primaries. Anchored in Framing Theory, the study examines how selected national newspapers shaped public perceptions of the credibility, transparency, and fairness of the primaries through their patterns of coverage. Library-based desk research and discourse analysis were employed to analyze newspaper content from seven national dailies: *The Punch*, *The Guardian*, *Vanguard*, *ThisDay*, *Daily Trust*, *The Nation*, and *Leadership*. Particular attention was given to language use, framing devices, and the representation of major political parties, including the APC, PDP, and LP. The findings reveal that the newspapers employed dominant frames such as conflict, power struggle, zoning debate, and internal democracy narratives, which influenced readers' perceptions of electoral fairness. In some cases, newspaper reports amplified crises and irregularities within certain parties while downplaying similar issues in others. Similarities and differences were also observed in how the newspapers portrayed political parties, with some newspapers offering more critical scrutiny than others. Through the lens of Framing Theory, the study demonstrates how newspaper coverage can

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shape what the public considers important, credible, and politically significant during sensitive electoral periods such as party primaries. The study concludes that Nigerian newspapers play a significant role in shaping political discourse and public trust during intra-party elections. It recommends improved journalistic training on ethical framing, active media monitoring by regulatory bodies, and stronger collaboration between political parties and the media to foster balanced coverage, strengthen internal party democracy, and support Nigeria's democratic development.

Keywords: Political Communication; Media Framing; Public Opinion; Intra-Party Primaries; Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Newspapers have long served as one of the most influential pillars of mass communication around the world. Since their emergence in the 17th century, newspapers have evolved from handwritten newsletters and printed gazettes into robust platforms for news reporting, public debate, political enlightenment, and civic mobilisation. In their traditional print form and now through digital editions, newspapers shape societies by informing, educating, entertaining, and, more importantly, influencing the thoughts and behaviours of readers.

Globally, the history of newspapers can be traced to Europe, particularly Germany and England. The first regularly published newspaper, Relation aller Fürnemmen und gedenckwürdigen Historien, was printed in Strasbourg in 1605. In England, The London Gazette, first published in 1665, laid the foundation for periodical journalism. From the 18th to the 20th century, newspapers became powerful institutions in shaping political and public discourse, especially during elections and times of governance crisis. With the dawn of the digital era, newspapers did not die out but transformed; creating online platforms and adopting multi-media storytelling to maintain their audience and influence (Gambo, 2022).

In Nigeria, the history of newspapers began in 1859 with the publication of Iwe Irohin, a Yoruba-language newspaper founded by Reverend Henry Townsend in Abeokuta. It served not only as a source of information but as a tool of cultural preservation and political education. Over the years, newspapers became critical players in the nation's journey

to independence, with titles like The West African Pilot (founded by Nnamdi Azikiwe), Daily Times, and Nigerian Tribune championing anti-colonial struggles and nationalist ideologies. Today, newspapers in Nigeria, such as The Vanguard, The Guardian, The Punch, ThisDay, Leadership, Daily Trust, The Nation, Daily Sun, Business Day, and Nigerian Tribune, continue to play a strategic role in setting political agendas and shaping public consciousness.

One area where this influence becomes especially visible is during intra-party elections or party primaries where political parties select their flag bearers. Unlike general elections which are open to the public, intra-party elections are internal contests that nonetheless attract national attention. These elections not only determine who emerges as party candidates for major offices such as the presidency, governorship, or senatorial seats, but also shape the national political narrative and future of governance. The media, particularly newspapers, cover these processes extensively; giving prominence to aspirants, framing party dynamics, highlighting controversies, and shaping how citizens perceive the transparency, fairness, and credibility of the process.

Public opinion refers to the attitudes, beliefs, and values shared by a segment of the population regarding issues of public concern. In the context of intra-party elections, public opinion includes how the electorate; whether party members or the general public; perceives the legitimacy of the process. The popularity of aspirants, and the internal democracy of political parties. Newspapers influence this opinion through framing, agenda-setting, and priming. By selecting what stories to tell, how to tell them, and whose voices to amplify, newspapers shape what people think about and how they think about it (Ufuoma & Princewill, 2024).

In the build-up to the 2023 general elections in Nigeria, intra-party elections conducted in 2022 by major political parties like the All Progressives Congress (APC), Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), and Labour Party (LP) generated widespread media coverage and public interest. Nigerian newspapers played a pivotal role in shaping the discourse, analysing candidates, revealing internal wrangling, interpreting zoning arrangements, and reporting delegate battles. For instance, The Vanguard provided deep coverage of the APC presidential primaries, with headlines framing Bola Tinubu's emergence

as both historic and controversial (Ganaah, Chigbu, & Aboh, 2025). The Punch closely monitored the PDP primaries, publishing features that analysed Atiku Abubakar's recurring candidacy and the implications of the party's zoning policy (Ambali, Ibrahim & Olatunji, 2024). ThisDay and Daily Trust offered critical insights into the growing popularity of Peter Obi in the Labour Party and the so-called "Obidient" movement that gained massive traction on social media and in newspaper commentary columns (Ayomola, 2017).

During this period, The Guardian ran editorial pieces focused on internal democracy within political parties, urging greater transparency and institution reforms (Mohammed, Samuel, Gogwim & Innocent, 2024). Similarly, Daily Sun amplified interviews and reports from disgruntled party members who felt marginalised during the delegate selection process. Meanwhile, Nigerian Tribune analysed the socio-cultural dimensions of candidate selection, particularly the controversy around the APC's Muslim-Muslim ticket. Leadership Newspaper and Business Day offered economic and political implications of intra-party decisions on Nigeria's business climate and international image.

Several past studies have investigated the media's role in influencing political participation and voter perception. Ezeani, Ikpegbu, & Ezeani (2024) found that newspapers significantly shaped political narratives by using selective coverage and persuasive language during the 2019 general elections. Similarly, Emmanuel & Walter (2020) observed that the editorial slant of newspapers could reinforce or challenge dominant political ideologies among their readership. Onyekwere & Ololo (2025) emphasised the role of newspapers in projecting or suppressing the voices of less prominent candidates in intra-party contests, thereby indirectly influencing who gains public legitimacy.

Discourse analysis, as a method, becomes particularly important in understanding not just what newspapers report but how they report it; the language, tone, metaphors, themes, and rhetorical tools used to construct meanings. As Ekweremadu (2019) and Akindele (2011) assert, media discourse does not merely reflect reality but constructs it. Through headlines, editorial choices, and repeated frames, newspapers influence public opinion by subtly guiding interpretation.

Against this background, this study explores how Nigerian newspapers influenced public opinion during the intra-party primaries of 2022, ahead of the 2023 general elections.

It seeks to examine the discourse strategies employed by key newspapers in framing political narratives, candidates, party ideologies, and election outcomes. By focusing on prominent newspapers and major political parties such as the APC, PDP, and LP, the study investigates how media representations shaped perception of transparency, fairness, credibility, and political momentum.

This study is significant not because it seeks to expose media bias or manipulate political sympathies, but because it aims to offer a better understanding of how newspapers function as opinion-shaping institutions during critical moments in Nigeria's democratic journey. As Nigeria continues to grapple with the challenges of electoral transparency, political trust, and internal party democracy, it becomes essential to assess how communication platforms such as newspapers impact these processes.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study were to:

i. examine the extent of newspaper coverage of intra-party elections in Nigeria during the 2022 party primaries of major political parties;
ii. analyse the strategies employed by select Nigerian newspapers in framing election processes during intra-party elections;
iii. assess how newspaper coverage influenced public opinion formation during intra-party electoral processes in Nigeria;
iv. identify the similarities and differences in the way national newspapers reported on intra-party primaries across the major political parties in the lead-up to the 2023 general elect ions.

Literature Review

Role of Newspapers in Nigeria's Political Communication: Historical Overview

Newspapers have played a vital role in political communication across the world. Globally, their journey began in the 17th century as printed sheets that shared news and official announcements. Over time, newspapers became tools for public awareness, political education, and mobilisation. In Nigeria, this journey started in 1859 with Iwe Irohin, founded by Reverend Henry Townsend. It was more than a news source; it was a platform to promote

literacy and religious values (Obiora & Chiamogu, 2020). Over the decades, newspapers in Nigeria grew in number and influence, becoming platforms through which citizens engage with national issues and politics.

Today, newspapers act as powerful political actors. They not only report on events but shape how people think about them. This is often done through agenda-setting and framing; choosing what stories to tell and how to tell them. Olabunmi (2023) explains that agenda-setting allows newspapers to guide public focus, while framing influences interpretation. Nigerian newspapers use headlines, editorials, and columns to direct attention to certain candidates, parties, or controversies. During political seasons, they can either support or criticise politicians, shaping readers' views consciously or unconsciously (Habu, 2010; Onyemaobi, 2018).

Throughout Nigeria's democratic journey, newspapers have been a constant presence. They were central during the independence struggle, the military years, and the return to civilian rule in 1999. Newspapers like The Guardian, Punch, and Tribune have challenged corruption, criticised abuse of power, and promoted democratic values. In more recent times, their roles have expanded with digital platforms reaching a wider audience. As noted by Olawoyin, Ayoola, Adebayo, Lawal, and Ojo (2023), Nigerian newspapers continue to reflect and shape public discourse, particularly during elections. They remain a bridge between political actors and the people, holding those in power to account and helping the public stay informed.

Understanding Public Opinion and its Formation during Intra-Party Primaries

Public opinion is the shared views, attitudes, and beliefs held by a group of people about a particular issue or event. It is shaped by how people feel or think about political leaders, parties, policies, or processes. Public opinion can be measured through surveys, interviews, or even public reactions on social media. It plays a key role in democratic systems because it gives insight into what the people want or expect from their leaders (Fajemisin, 2023). In the context of elections, it can influence not only voter behaviour but also how political parties act.

Public opinion does not form in a vacuum. It is shaped by many factors such as media content, political campaigns, cultural values, religious beliefs, and even peer discussions. Newspapers, in particular, influence public opinion through what they report and how they report it. According to McCombs and Shaw (2018), newspapers use agenda-setting and framing to influence what people think about and how they interpret political issues. During intra-party elections, newspapers highlight certain candidates more than others, and this can sway public interest or trust. Politicians and parties also try to control the narrative by using favourable media coverage to win support.

In intra-party elections, public opinion matters more than many people realise. Though only party members may vote in primaries, the opinion of the wider public can influence who gets support, funding, and visibility. A candidate who enjoys strong public support, as seen in media reports and public debates, often becomes a stronger contender. As Mahmud & Obulu (2025) observed, media-driven public opinion can help shape internal party decisions and even pressure party leaders to act in certain ways. Understanding how public opinion forms and spreads is crucial to understanding how intra-party elections unfold in Nigeria today.

Intra-Party Elections and Political Party Dynamics in Nigeria

Intra-party elections are internal processes through which political parties select their candidates for public offices. These elections are vital because they help determine who represents the party in general elections. A strong and fair intra-party election process often reflects the strength of the party itself. According to Ndubuisi & Omeire (2025), the way parties organise these internal elections affects public trust, party unity, and the outcome of national elections. In Nigeria, intra-party primaries are often hotly contested, especially within big parties like the APC, PDP, and LP.

The process of conducting primaries within political parties is intended to uphold internal democracy by ensuring that all members can participate fairly in selecting their party's candidates. Despite this ideal, many political parties in Nigeria continue to grapple with challenges such as candidate imposition, vote purchasing, and manipulation of delegates. Research conducted by Onyishi & Mazi Mbah (2016) revealed that a majority of Nigerian political parties exhibit deficiencies in internal democracy, resulting in a lack of credibility in their primary elections. Even during the 2022 primaries leading up to the 2023 elections,

there were numerous instances of conflicting congresses and internal rifts, notably within the APC and PDP (Okpokiri, Amadi, & Njoku, 2025).

Over time, Nigeria has consistently encountered difficulties when organizing party primaries, including issues related to transparency, interference from powerful individuals (godfatherism), and inadequate resolution of intra-party conflicts. Consequently, these hurdles have led to party members defecting and resorting to legal battles post-primaries, which have adversely affected the parties' effectiveness during national elections. For example, after the primary elections in 2018 and 2022, numerous dissatisfied candidates left their parties, thereby diminishing their electoral performance (Ufuoma & Princewill, 2024). To promote their growth and improve democratic processes, political parties must strengthen their internal mechanisms and adhere to their set guidelines.

Newspaper Coverage and Discourse Strategies During the 2022 Party Primaries

Newspapers play a strong role in shaping how people understand political events. During Nigeria's 2022 party primaries, several major newspapers covered the activities of the AP C, PDP, LP, and other parties. They reported on candidates, party conflicts, delegate decisions, and power struggles. The way these stories were written; through headlines, images, and word choices - had a big impact on how readers formed opinions about the primaries. According to McCombs and Shaw (2018), newspapers set the public agenda by deciding which stories are important and how they are presented.

Language use in political news is not neutral. Newspapers often use framing techniques; selecting certain angles, repeating certain words, and leaving out others; to influence how people see issues. A study by Ajakaiye, Omole, & Olawunmi (2025) shows that many Nigerian newspapers use emotional or persuasive language, especially during election periods. For example, during the APC primaries, The Punch described Bola Tinubu's campaign as a battle of loyalty and legacy, while The Guardian framed the PDP primaries as a test of internal unity. Such phrases are not just informative; they shape meaning and suggest judgment.

Some newspapers clearly focused more on certain candidates or parties. Vanguard, for instance, gave wide attention to Tinubu and Atiku, often highlighting their past achievements and political strength. In contrast, Daily Trust offered deeper regional and grassroots perspectives, especially in the North. According to Ajakaiye, Omole, & Olawunmi (2025), this difference in focus often reflects each newspaper's ownership, editorial policy,

and target audience. The Labour Party and Peter Obi also received strong media attention, especially in ThisDay, which portrayed Obi as a rising alternative with youth appeal (Hart & Winter, 2022).

The way newspapers present political actors and events is called discursive construction. This includes not just what is said, but how it is said. For example, describing a candidate as embattled or respected immediately shapes public feeling. Opeyemi (2020) argues that such choices can strengthen or weaken a politicians image. In the 2022 primaries, many papers used labels like front- runner, dark horse, or party loyalist to position candidates in certain ways. This shows that newspapers are not just passing information they are helping to build public meaning and perception around politics in Nigeria.

Influence of Newspaper Framing on Public Perception of Electoral Credibility

The media, especially newspapers, play a major role in shaping how people see elections. The way election news is reported affects how much trust people have in the electoral process. When newspapers use clear, balanced, and factual language, they can boost public confidence. But when stories focus only on conflict, fraud, or crisis, they can damage trust. According to Von Sikorski & Knoll (2019), media reports during elections in Nigeria often mix facts with opinions, which can confuse or mislead the public.

Public reaction to newspaper stories depends on how people interpret the messages. Sometimes, headlines can trigger doubt or anger, especially when they suggest rigging or injustice. A study by Ahmed (2021) found that sensational headlines during elections increased public anxiety and suspicion. People often judge the credibility of elections based on what they read in the news. If newspapers report that results were manipulated or that some candidates were imposed, the public is likely to question the fairness of the election.

The framing of stories also plays a big role. For instance, describing an election as "marred by violence" or "largely peaceful" can create two completely different images in the readers mind . Yusuf (2025) argues that the language used in media texts can shape political beliefs and influence public opinion deeply . When newspapers frame politicians as corrupt or dishonest, it affects how people vote and whether they trust the process. This makes newspapers powerful tools in democracy but also a source of concern when reporting is biased or incomplete.

In Nigeria's democracy, this influence comes with a big responsibility. Newspapers are expected to inform, not mislead. They should help people make informed choices by

reporting fairly and avoiding political bias. As Biyogo & Oloo Ongonga (2024) explained, responsible journalism helps build democratic values and public trust. When media content is truthful and balanced, it supports peace and accountability. But when it is sensational or one-sided, it can fuel division and weaken democracy.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Framing Theory. The theory explains how the media shapes the way people think about and understand issues by highlighting certain aspects of a story while downplaying others. A "frame" refers to the specific angle or perspective through which a news story is presented. It includes the choice of words, images, headlines, and themes that direct attention and influence interpretation. This theory suggests that the way information is "framed" affects how audiences perceive reality. By selecting what to include, what to leave out, and how to present facts, the media can subtly guide public opinion and emotional response.

Framing Theory was first introduced by Erving Goffman in 1974 in his book Frame Analysis, where he explained how individuals understand their world through interpretive frames. However, it was later developed further and applied to mass communication by Robert Entman in the 1990s. Entman (1993) defined framing as selecting "some aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient" in communication, to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, or solution. In the context of journalism, framing is seen in how reporters, editors, and media owners choose the stories to publish and the angles they adopt.

This theory is highly relevant to this study because it helps explain how Nigerian newspapers influenced public opinion during the 2022 intra-party primaries. By framing candidates, political parties, and election events in specific ways; using headlines like "battle for the soul of APC" or "PDP in turmoil", newspapers shaped how readers understood the fairness, credibility, and outcomes of the primaries. The framing choices made by newspapers like The Punch, Vanguard, and Daily Trust could either build or erode trust in the electoral process. Therefore, applying Framing Theory allows the study to analyse not just what was reported, but how it was reported, and what impact it had on public perception.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a library research design and employed discourse analysis as its main method of enquiry. Library research involves the collection and examination of already existing data and materials, such as books, journal articles, newspaper reports, editorials, and archival documents relevant to the subject matter. For this research, materials were sourced from academic libraries, online databases (such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, and African Journals Online), national newspaper archives, and credible publications spanning from 2017 to 2025. Key sources included political communication textbooks, peer-reviewed journals on media and democracy, and documented reports from Nigerian newspapers including The Punch, Vanguard, The Guardian, Daily Trust, This Day, and The Nation. These sources provided both scholarly and practical insights into how Nigerian newspapers have influenced public opinion during intra-party elections.

Discourse analysis was used to critically examine the language, tone, framing, and narrative structures found in selected newspaper texts. This approach allowed the study to uncover the deeper meanings behind the media coverage of the 2022 intra-party primaries in Nigeria, focusing on how certain words, headlines, and themes constructed public understanding of political actors, events, and electoral credibility. Through close textual reading, the research identified patterns in media representation, including bias, agenda-setting, and ideological framing. By interpreting these patterns, the study was able to draw connections between media discourse and the shaping of public opinion during the primaries conducted by major political parties such as the APC, PDP, and LP in the lead-up to the 2023 general elections.

RESULTS

Table 1: Major Framings in Nigerian Newspapers during 2022 Intra-Party Primaries

Framing Theme	Description	Example Focus
Zoning/Regional Interest	Emphasis on power rotation (North vs. South) and regional equity in candidate selection. Dominated coverage.	APC's debate over a Southern candidate (Tinubu) vs. PDP's Northern preference (Atiku)
Personality Projection	Focus on aspirants' charisma, past achievements, or controversies rather than policy agendas.	Tinubu's "Emilokan" declaration; Atiku's experience; Osinbajo's technocratic image
Aspirant Character	Scrutiny of moral integrity,	Questions about Tinubu's health;

Framing Theme	Description	Example Focus
	corruption allegations, or leadership style.	Obi's governance record
Internal Party Crisis	Highlighting factional disputes, delegate manipulation, or financial influence in primaries.	APC's high nomination fees (₦100M); PDP's post-primary defections
Electoral Violence	Reports on clashes, intimidation, or logistical failures during primary elections.	Incidents in PDP primaries in Rivers State; APC's delegate disputes

Source: Newspaper archives

DISCUSSION

Discourse Analysis 1: To what extent did Nigerian newspapers cover intra-party elections during the 2022 party primaries of major political parties?

Nigerian newspapers gave widespread attention to the 2022 intra-party elections of major political parties, including the All Progressives Congress (APC), Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), and Labour Party (LP). The coverage was consistent across leading dailies like The Punch, Vanguard, The Guardian, and Daily Trust. These newspapers provided day-by-day reports, interviews, breaking news updates, and front-page headlines, highlighting not just the outcomes but also the internal wrangling, controversies, and political strategies that defined the primaries. This frequent reportage indicates a deliberate effort by the press to inform the public about the pre-election developments shaping the 2023 general elections.

Using Framing Theory, which suggests that the way information is presented influences how audiences interpret it (Goffman, 1974), newspapers framed the primaries in distinct ways. For example, The Nation and Vanguard emphasised themes of political survival, elite power struggles, and zoning debates, while Daily Trust highlighted northern and southern regional divides. These frames played a significant role in shaping how readers perceived the primaries; either as fair contests or as flawed exercises riddled with manipulation and elite dominance. In line with Entman's (1993) view of framing, the media's selective emphasis helped define problems, diagnose causes, and suggest moral judgments about the primaries.

The main findings show that newspapers covered intra-party primaries extensively, but not neutrally. Most reports focused on controversies, political scheming, godfatherism, money politics, and elite control. Frames such as "internal crisis," "youth exclusion, " and "zoning battles" appeared across several publications. These findings reveal that while

coverage was high, it was shaped by media framing, which influenced public opinion by highlighting the tensions, irregularities, and factional interests within parties. This framing ultimately contributed to public scepticism about the transparency and fairness of the primaries.

Discourse Analysis 2: What discourse strategies did selected Nigerian newspapers employ in framing election processes during intra-party elections?

During the 2022 intra-party elections in Nigeria, selected national newspapers employed various discourse strategies to frame political events. Newspapers like The Punch, Vanguard, and Daily Trust frequently used loaded language, dramatic headlines, and selective sourcing to construct narratives around political actors and party primaries. For instance, words like "power tussle," "betrayal," and "consensus imposition" were commonly used to dramatise events and amplify internal conflicts. The use of quotes from party chieftains, anonymous insiders, and political analysts helped shape public perception of events, often steering the focus toward crisis and controversy rather than policy debates.

With the backings of Framing Theory, these discourse strategies worked by selecting and emphasising particular aspects of the primaries while downplaying others. As Entman (1993) explains, framing is not just about inclusion but also exclusion. For example, The Nation often framed APC's primaries as a matter of party discipline and strategic calculation, while The Guardian highlighted the PDP's internal disagreements and zoning debates as evidence of instability. By focusing on different angles; conflict, regionalism, power dynamics; newspapers subtly guided readers' understanding and judgement of the electoral processes. These strategic discursive choices reflect how media frames are used to construct meaning and influence public interpretation.

The main findings reveal that Nigerian newspapers used conflict framing, ethno-regional framing, elite dominance framing, youth exclusion, and transparency framing to shape narratives around intra-party elections. These frames were employed through carefully chosen headlines, repeated themes, and emphasis on party factions or key political figures. Such strategies influenced how readers understood the fairness, inclusiveness, and credibility of the primaries, reinforcing public concerns about the democratic quality of Nigeria's internal party politics.

Discourse Analysis 3: How did newspaper coverage influence public opinion formation during intra-party electoral processes in Nigeria?

Newspaper coverage played a key role in shaping public opinion on the credibility, transparency, and fairness of intra-party elections during Nigeria's 2022 party primaries. Through headlines, language choice, and selective reporting, newspapers influenced how readers understood the political environment. When newspapers like The Guardian and Daily Trust highlighted alleged vote-buying, imposition of candidates, or lack of internal democracy, they raised doubts in the public mind about the legitimacy of the primaries. On the other hand, The Nation and Leadership sometimes portrayed the processes as peaceful or strategic, creating a mixed perception across audiences.

Using Framing Theory, the influence becomes clearer. As it is known, framing is about selecting certain aspects of reality to promote particular interpretations. Newspapers used conflict frames, elite dominance frames, and transparency frames to present narratives that guided public evaluation of the primaries. For instance, by repeatedly framing the APC and PDP primaries as "battles of the godfathers" or "chaotic", papers encouraged public scepticism about party internal democracy. In contrast, more balanced reports in Business Day and ThisDay gave room for alternative viewpoints, though these were less dominant in circulation.

The main findings show that newspaper coverage significantly shaped public opinion by focusing on issues of candidate imposition, lack of internal party transparency, and ethno-political power plays. These framings contributed to widespread public perception that the intra-party elections were flawed, elite-controlled, and lacked fairness. Thus, newspapers not only informed but subtly directed public sentiment, reinforcing distrust in Nigeria's party politics and raising concerns about the democratic quality of electoral processes.

Discourse Analysis 4: What similarities and differences can be identified in the way national newspapers reported on intra-party primaries across the major political parties in the lead-up to the 2023 general elections?

Across Nigeria's national newspapers, there were noticeable similarities and differences in how intra-party primaries were reported in the build-up to the 2023 general elections. Most papers, including The Punch, Vanguard, and Daily Trust, provided regular updates on the major parties - APC, PDP, and LP – often highlighting internal conflicts, candidate selection processes, and regional politics. A common similarity was the use of

sensational headlines that focused on power struggles, defections, and zoning controversies, indicating a dominant conflict frame and strategic game frame across news platforms.

However, there were also differences in tone and depth of coverage. For example, The Nation, known for its closeness to the APC, framed the party's primaries more positively, highlighting unity and strategic decision-making. In contrast, The Guardian and ThisDay often framed the PDP primaries with a focus on internal disagreements and legal battles. Coverage of Labour Party primaries varied, with some newspapers overlooking them or offering minimal analysis, possibly due to perceived lower political influence at the time. These variations reflect the ideological leanings and editorial priorities of each media house.

Framing Theory helps explain these patterns. As the theory suggested, media outlets select certain aspects of events to promote specific interpretations. The main findings show that while all newspapers applied similar frames; conflict, personality, and transparency. The extent and tone differed based on party, region, and editorial bias. This uneven framing shaped diverse public opinions on party credibility, suggesting that media not only reported but influenced how parties were judged in the court of public opinion.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined how Nigerian newspapers influenced public opinion formation during the 2022 intra party primaries through their patterns of coverage and discourse strategies. The analysis revealed that newspapers played a significant role in shaping public narratives around the internal democratic processes of political parties. Using Framing Theory, the study showed how the media employed various frames such as conflict, strategy, and personality to construct meaning and influence how the public interpreted the transparency and fairness of the primaries. The use of language, tone, and focus areas in different newspapers highlighted their ability to either build or damage the image of political parties during the electoral process.

It is clear that national newspapers were not neutral observers but active participants in the political communication space during the 2022 party primaries. Their framing of events helped shape public trust or doubt in the internal processes of major parties like the APC, PDP, and LP. The findings also underscore the fact that differences in coverage were influenced by editorial positions and perceived political affiliations. These insights affirm the

relevance of discourse analysis in understanding media influence and call for greater responsibility and balance in political reporting to support democratic growth in Nigeria.

Recommendations

The study recommends that:

i. media organisations should strengthen internal editorial policies to ensure balanced and comprehensive coverage of intra-party elections. This will help to reduce bias and promote inclusiveness in political reporting, especially during crucial moments like party primaries;
ii. journalists and editors should receive regular training on ethical framing and political discourse strategies. This will enable them to present election stories with fairness, accuracy, and clarity, while avoiding sensationalism or manipulation of public perception;
iii. the Nigerian Press Council and media watchdogs should actively monitor and evaluate newspaper coverage during political events to identify patterns of undue bias or misinformation that may influence public opinion negatively, particularly during intra-party electoral processes;
iv. political parties and media liaison officers should engage with the press more openly and transparently to bridge the gap in reporting differences across parties. This collaboration will help promote accurate representation of internal democratic practices and reduce the dominance of selective narratives in national dailies.

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