



Newspaper Framing of Political News and Public Opinion in Osun State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined how the Nigerian newspapers frame political news and public opinion. The objectives specifically examined the dominant frame, political themes, tone and public opinion of political issues. A Mixed-method research design was adopted for this study. While content analysis was used to observe political framing in *The Punch*, *Vanguard*, *The Nation*, and *The Guardian* newspapers published between January and December 2024, a survey was adopted to measure the perceptions of 400 readers regarding the newspapers' framing of political issues. Results indicated that the most dominant frames were conflict and economic consequences (20.3% and 19.2%), with *The Punch* and *The Guardian* showing stronger usage. Further results showed that newspaper framing of political issues altered readers' public opinion and perceptions of those issues (73.5%). The study concluded that the Nigerian press should adopt a more balanced framing by incorporating underutilised perspectives, such as the human-interest and interpretative reporting, to help the media audience with their understanding of political issues.

Keywords: newspaper framing, political news, media influence, public opinion, media audience

Introduction

In a democratic society like Nigeria, citizens encounter political events through direct experience and media reports. These events may generate reactions ranging from protests and grievances to concerns about public order, government performance and policy demands. Such responses can direct public attention towards different political actors, causes and consequences. The significance of political news therefore lies not only in the events reported but also in how they are constructed and interpreted, particularly when political issues are contested and public opinion is forming.

Media framing is central to mass communication because news organisations select, emphasise and organise aspects of reality to make particular interpretations more salient. Abdulazeez et al. (2024) conceptualise framing as selecting aspects of perceived reality and emphasising them in communication. This process involves defining problems, identifying causes, making evaluations and suggesting remedies. In political communication, framing is shaped by political actors, government institutions, opposition groups, policies and public concerns. Bamgboye et al. (2026) observed that political actors and institutions often attach different interpretations to the same event, requiring media organisations to select from competing facts and perspectives. Consequently, political reports may foreground particular actors, causes, responsibilities or conflicts while marginalising alternative interpretations. Tejedor and Cervi (2022) identified responsibility, conflict, human interest, economic consequences and morality as recurrent political news frames, whose prevalence varies across outlets and topics. These frames provide interpretive cues that may shape how audiences evaluate political issues and actors (Ogbwude & Onyeka, 2020).



Nigeria's political environment in 2024 further highlights the relevance of examining political news framing. Public debate intensified over economic hardship, petrol subsidy removal, inflation, naira depreciation, government policies and demands for improved living conditions. These concerns culminated in the nationwide #EndBadGovernance protests in August 2024. Reuters (2024a) reported that inflation reached 34.2% in mid-2024, amid growing dissatisfaction associated with subsidy removal and naira devaluation. The protests subsequently generated competing interpretations concerning economic hardship, the right to protest, government accountability, national security, violence and political mobilisation (Reuters, 2024b). Newspapers could therefore present these developments as legitimate public grievances, consequences of government policies, threats to public order or attempts to destabilise the government (Ifeoluwa et al., 2026). This makes 2024 a relevant period for examining political news frames, themes and tones and their relationship with audience perceptions in Osun State.

Previous Nigerian studies have examined newspaper framing of election campaigns and political candidates (Ojebuyi & Salawu, 2018; Ukonu & Ajaero, 2017), as well as conflicts, protests and socio-political movements (Akpojivi & Aiseng, 2022; Nwankwo, 2021; Osisanwo & Iyoha, 2020). These studies demonstrate that political news framing may be shaped by issue type, ownership, political alignment and journalistic practices. However, much of the research focuses on specific events or political issues, leaving limited understanding of the broader patterns of political news frames, themes and tones in 2024 and their relationship with public opinion among newspaper readers in Osun State. This study therefore investigates newspaper framing of political news and public opinion in Osun State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

In a democratic society, citizens rely on newspapers for political information, but political news is not a neutral transmission of events. Journalists and news organisations select and emphasise particular aspects of events, foregrounding certain actors and interpretations. This becomes especially significant when political events attract competing perspectives. In Nigeria, the economic reforms, inflation, petrol subsidy removal, naira depreciation and rising living costs of 2024 intensified public debates about governance and socioeconomic conditions. These concerns contributed to the nationwide #EndBadGovernance protests, which began on 1 August 2024. The protests generated competing interpretations of economic hardship, citizens' right to protest, government accountability, public order and national security. Human Rights Watch reported that government officials and security agencies portrayed the planned protests as politically motivated and potentially threatening, while protesters and civil society actors emphasised economic hardship and governance concerns.

Previous studies demonstrate the strategic nature of political news framing in Nigeria. Oloyede and Owolabi (2024) found that newspapers framed the primaries preceding the 2023 presidential election around regional interests, personality projection and candidates' perceived strengths. Obukoadata et al. (2024) identified various propaganda devices in newspaper coverage of political parties during the 2019 electioneering period, while Abubakre (2024) found that conflict-oriented and negative frames featured prominently in particular forms of Nigerian political reporting.

The problem also extends to how audiences interpret political coverage. Newspaper frames may influence which considerations readers prioritise when evaluating political issues and actors, although interpretation is also shaped by prior knowledge, political experience and interpersonal



communication (Oloyede & Owolabi, 2024). Ajakaiye et al. (2024) similarly highlighted the need to investigate newspaper framing and audience perception rather than assume uniform responses to media messages. Despite these studies, a gap remains in understanding broader patterns of political news framing during Nigeria's 2024 political environment and their relationship with public opinion among newspaper readers in Osun State. This study therefore examines newspaper framing of political news and public opinion in Osun State, Nigeria.

Objectives to the Study

1. To observe the dominant frames used in reporting political news in selected newspapers between January and December 2024.
2. Identify the major themes represented in political news reports in the selected newspapers during the study period.
3. Examine the dominant tone of political news in the selected newspaper between January and December 2024.
4. Understand the perception of newspaper readers in Osun State regarding political framings presented in the selected newspapers.

Media Framing and Dissemination of Political News

The concept of framing by Ojebuyi and Salawu (2018) involves selecting certain aspects of a reality and projecting them to promote a particular problem. This implies that the mass media do not just report political events but shape these events by framing how the audience will perceive political issues and actors. Furthermore, media framing operates through two key processes: media frames constructed by journalists and editors and individual frames formed by audiences (Eze & Udo, 2018). These frames influence how political news is perceived and interpreted. Political news, according to Layinka and Owoeye (2024), can be framed around conflict, responsibility, human interest, morality, political strategy, performance, electoral competition or particular political personalities. These frames are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and their significance depends on the political context and the characteristics of the media organisation. For example, a report about a government policy can be presented as evidence of governmental achievement, as a failure of leadership, as a conflict between political actors, or as an issue affecting ordinary citizens. Each construction potentially directs attention towards different causes, evaluations and solutions.

Studies like those of Abwami and Shahid (2024) have examined how media framing influences the dissemination and reception of political news by analysing media coverage of elections in Nigeria and found that framing is an integral part of news reportage, especially in political communication. Ifeoluwa et al. (2026) studied newspaper coverage of the 2015 presidential elections and observed that political news was often framed along ethnic and party lines, which in turn influenced public perception and voting behaviour. Therefore, the relevance of framing to political communication lies in its distinction from simple news selection or agenda setting. Whereas agenda-setting research primarily examines the salience of issues, framing draws attention to the interpretive dimensions of news: the meanings attached to those issues and the perspectives through which audiences are encouraged to understand them. Okonkwo (2025) argued that framing should be examined as a process involving frame building, frame setting, individual-level interpretation and feedback between audiences and media producers. This distinction is important for the present study because the question is not only which political issues



receive newspaper attention in Osun State, but also which interpretive frames dominate such coverage and how those frames relate to citizens' opinions about political issues.

Newspaper Framing and Political Issues in Nigeria

There is empirical evidence that political and public-interest issues are framed differently across newspapers. For instance, Akpojivi and Aiseng's (2022) comparative study of *The Guardian* and *Vanguard* during the #BringBackOurGirls campaign identified frames of government failure, citizen desperation, politicisation of government action and heroism. The study further found differences in the depth and style of reporting between the two newspapers, suggesting that editorial orientation can affect how political actors and events are represented. Importantly, however, the newspapers sometimes employed similar broad frames despite their ideological differences. This finding suggests that political circumstances may generate common interpretive patterns even where newspapers differ editorially.

Similarly, research on the framing of the 2015 presidential candidates found that Nigerian newspapers organised political coverage around particular themes and framing patterns rather than presenting candidates in an entirely uniform manner (Umar, 2020). More recent research on the 2023 political party primaries also indicates that newspapers constructed narratives around power struggles, zoning, conflict and internal party democracy (Abdulazeez et al., 2024). These findings suggest continuity in the tendency of Nigerian political journalism to interpret politics through competition, elite contestation and strategic manoeuvring. Furthermore, Abwami and Shahid (2024) observed newspaper coverage of the 2023 fuel subsidy removal and found episodic framing to be dominant, accounting for 72.5% of the coverage, while human-interest, responsibility and morality frames were also prominent. Such findings are significant because episodic coverage tends to represent political problems through specific events, individuals and immediate consequences rather than through broader structural explanations. Ajetunmobi (2023) argued that Nigerian newspapers do not necessarily converge around one dominant interpretation. Ajetunmobi's (2023) study found a sharp division between newspapers that emphasised accountability and responsibility and those that relied more heavily on conflict and event-oriented reporting. The implication is that different newspapers can construct substantially different versions of the same political or socioeconomic reality.

Newspaper Framing and Public Opinion

Public opinion refers broadly to the distribution of citizens' views, evaluations and attitudes concerning political actors, institutions, policies and issues. In the context of political communication, Stylianos and Giannouli (2025) observe that the media constitute an important source of information through which citizens develop interpretations of political events. This observation does not mean that media messages independently determine public opinion. Rather, media frames interact with citizens' prior beliefs, political affiliations, interpersonal communication and social experiences. According to Odeyemi (2020), the framing of political news provides a strong basis for expecting an association between the way political issues are presented and the way audiences understand those issues. For Ojebuyi and Salawu (2018) who also observed news framing of Nigeria's Seventh National Assembly found a substantial proportion of respondents having negative perceptions of the legislature. The study itself combines media content and audience responses, but the complex processes through which audiences encounter, interpret and act upon news remain difficult to isolate. Odeyemi (2020) study on the framing of the 2019 presidential election campaigns in Nigerian newspapers and found a



relationship between newspaper framing, audience perception and voting patterns. This present study is beyond identifying frames to considering audience opinion.

Therefore, Oyenuga and Akinbode, (2020) examined newspaper influence on public opinion during Nigerian intra-party elections reports that conflict, power struggle, zoning and internal-democracy frames shaped perceptions of electoral fairness. The study further argues that newspapers sometimes amplified political crises while downplaying comparable problems involving other actors. This reinforces the argument that framing can influence what audiences perceive as important and credible, but it also highlights the need to distinguish between media representation and audience interpretation (Okonkwo, 2025). The literature therefore supports two related but competing propositions. The first is the media-influence proposition, which holds that the repeated selection and emphasis of particular interpretations can affect citizens' perceptions of political actors and issues (Okonkwo, 2025; Oko-Epelle et al., 2026). The second is the audience-agency proposition, which recognises that citizens do not passively receive media meanings and that political predispositions and social contexts can mediate media effects Ojebuyi and Salawu (2018). The present study is situated between these positions by investigating the relationship between newspaper framing of political news and public opinion rather than assuming that framing automatically determines opinion.

Empirical Review

Newspaper framing of political stories has become an integral area of discussion as it has been attributed to shaping public opinion and bringing about citizens' engagement with government initiatives. Newspapers not only gate-keep political information but construct and reinforce meaningful events through selective emphasises and interpretation. For instance, media framing of political instability in West African countries has influenced certain developmental policies (Abwami & Shahid., 2024). As observed by Abwami and Shahid (2024) sensational reporting has a way of exacerbating public fear and tension, which may prompt the government of some countries to react rather than to adopt strategic policies. These findings have pointed out the fact that media narratives of political events and actors not only mirror societal anxiety, but it also shape the governance landscape of the country's political system.

Abdulazeez et al. (2024) observed how story narratives around religion, ethnicity and economic disparities were shaped during the 2023 presidential elections. The authors further revealed that the *Punch Newspaper* framed the Muslim-Muslim ticket while *The Vanguard Newspaper* focused more on covering responses to the perceived Muslim-Muslim ticket. These narratives were perceived to bring about societal divisions. Abdulazeez et al. (2024) further posit that newspaper framing of political stories during elections may result to polarisation which may influence the voting behaviour of voters. On the other hand, Ajetunmobi (2023) observed that the intersection of media framing, identity construction and journalism ethics in Nigeria and found a prevalent use of conflict-driven frames in the Nigerian newspaper. The author submitted that newspaper organisations leverage on narratives to undermine peace-oriented reporting. Layinka and Owoye (2024) also revealed how political elites in Nigeria use the media to frame national issues in order to project an agenda, control resources or garner public sympathy. The author traces major issues with story framing in the newspaper, submits that political elites now leverage the platform to compete for public attention and legitimacy.



Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Framing Theory and Perception Theory, which complement each other in explaining how newspapers construct and present political issues and how audiences perceive and interpret those representations. Goffman (1974) introduced the concept of frames as interpretive structures through which media organisations select, emphasise and organise aspects of reality. Entman (1993) further explained framing as the selection and salience of particular aspects of perceived reality to promote specific problem definitions, causal interpretations, moral evaluations and proposed remedies. In this study, Framing Theory provides a basis for examining how newspapers present political issues, such as electoral conflict, corruption, public policy and political leadership, through frames including conflict, responsibility, human interest, morality and performance. However, Framing Theory has been criticised for conceptual inconsistency, particularly regarding the definition and operationalisation of frames. While Entman (1993) emphasises selection and salience, other perspectives highlight cultural structures, journalistic routines and audience interpretation. Scheufele (1999) therefore conceptualises framing as a process involving frame building, frame setting and individual-level interpretation. This distinction is important because identifying a frame in newspaper content does not necessarily mean that audiences interpret the message as intended.

Perception Theory explains how individuals select, organise and interpret information to make sense of their environment. Rather than passively absorbing media messages, audiences actively process information based on prior experiences, expectations, interests, beliefs, values and situational factors (Schramm, 1954). This perspective helps explain how newspaper framing relates to public opinion: newspaper frames provide information and interpretive cues, but audiences construct meaning based on their existing orientations. Individuals may pay greater attention to information that aligns with their interests and beliefs, while discounting or defensively interpreting information that challenges their views. Thus, framing can influence interpretation without necessarily determining audience responses.

Accordingly, Framing Theory primarily explains the study's first variable, newspaper framing, by providing a basis for examining how political issues are selected, emphasised and presented. Perception Theory illuminates the second variable, public opinion, by explaining how audiences interpret political information and develop perceptions, evaluations and attitudes towards political issues and actors. The relationship between the variables is therefore not simply that newspaper framing causes public opinion. Rather, newspaper frames provide interpretive cues that audiences process, while their characteristics and prior orientations shape how these cues are perceived and reflected in political opinion.

Methodology

A mixed-methods research design was adopted for this study, combining quantitative content analysis of selected newspapers (*The Punch*, *Vanguard*, *The Nation*, and *The Guardian*) with a cross-sectional survey of newspaper readers in Osun State. The content analysis examined the dominant frames, themes and tones used in political news published by *The Punch*, *Vanguard*, *The Nation*, and *The Guardian* between January and December 2024. While the survey examined newspaper readership, exposure to political news, respondents' perceptions of political news frames and their opinion about political issues. The study comprised two populations. For the content analysis, the population consist of all political news published by *The Punch*, *Vanguard*, *The Nation*, and *The Guardian* between January and December 2024. These newspapers were



purposively selected for the study because of their national reach and regular coverage of political issues. Across the four selected newspapers, 576 issues constituted the sampling frame based on 48 selected editions for each newspaper during the 12-month study duration. For the survey, the population consisted of newspaper readers aged 18 and above residing in six local government areas in Osun State: Ede North, Ede South, Ife Central, Iwo, Osogbo and Olorunda. The projected population of these selected LGAs according to the National Population Commission (2024) is 1,609,481. Purposive sampling was adopted to select *The Punch*, *Vanguard*, *The Nation*, and *The Guardian*. To obtain a distributed sample of newspaper editions, the 12-month period was divided into strata.

The study further adopted composite-week sampling to minimise daily and seasonal variations in newspaper content. Dates were randomly selected within the identified periods, with the same dates examined across the four newspapers. This yielded 48 editions per newspaper and 192 editions in total.

For the survey, a multistage sampling procedure was used. First, six LGAs were purposively selected: Ede North, Ede South, Ife Central, Iwo, Osogbo and Olorunda. Second, two electoral wards were randomly selected from each LGA: Iremo V and More Ojaja (Ife Central); Asunmo and Alajue II (Ede South); Isale Oba I and Molete I (Iwo); Otun Hagun B and Jagun B (Osogbo); Oloba/Atapara and Olusokun (Ede North); and Agowande and Balogun (Olorunda). Third, two communities were randomly selected from each sampled ward. Fourth, households were systematically sampled using available household lists, with the sampling interval determined by the number of households in each community. Eligible respondents were newspaper readers aged 18 years and above. Where multiple eligible respondents were available in a household, the selection procedure specified in the field protocol was followed. Yamane's (1967) formula was used to determine a sample size of 400.

Political stories were categorised into campaign coverage, government policies, political scandals and corruption, political conflicts and crises, political opinion columns and editorials, and political actors' profiles and interviews. A structured coding sheet captured newspaper title, publication date, political issue, story prominence, dominant frame, themes and tone. A structured, closed-ended questionnaire was used for the survey. Three experts in Mass Communication and Media Studies assessed the instruments for face validity, focusing on clarity, relevance and adequacy. Construct validity was supported by Framing Theory, particularly Entman's (1993) conceptualisation of framing. Cohen's Kappa yielded an average inter-coder reliability coefficient of 0.78 across key variables, while the Spearman-Brown formula produced a questionnaire reliability coefficient of 0.71, indicating acceptable reliability.

Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, with frequencies and percentages used to establish the distribution of political stories and the prevalence of framing categories across the selected newspapers and political issues.

Data Presentation

Table 1: Dominant frame type used by Nigerian newspapers in reporting political news

Dominant Frame type	Punch	Vanguard	The Nation	Guardian	Percentage (%)
Conflict frame	44	23	12	38	20.3%
Responsibility frame	26	8	9	22	11.2%
Human Interest frame	-	6	3	7	2.7%
Morality frame	19	1	-	11	5.3%
Economic Consequence	51	12	13	35	19.2%
Total	140	50	37	113	100%

Table 1 presents data on the dominance frame type used by the Nigerian newspapers in reporting political narratives. These findings imply that the conflict frame and the economic-consequence frame were the most frequently used across the four newspapers. From the results, there is relatively low use of responsibility, human-interest, and morality frames.

Table 2. Frequency table showing framed political theme

Framed themes	Punch	Vanguard	The Nation	Guardian	Percentage (%)
Elections	39	41	32	35	25.5%
Corruption	47	29	21	17	17.7%
Governance	41	37	41	34	26.5%
Security	25	32	12	35	18.0%
Total	152	139	106	121	100%

The table above examined political themes in newspapers' political news. Findings above imply that governance and elections are the most frequently framed political themes across all newspapers. Further findings indicate that corruption accounts for 17.7% of coverage, with Punch (47) contributing the highest number of corruption-related stories.

Table 3: Frequency Table Showing Tone toward Political Actor/Issue

Tone	Punch	Vanguard	The Nation	Guardian	Percentage (%)
Positive	3	5	1	-	0.1%
Neutral	-	2	-	2	0.0%
Negative	11	10	9	5	6.0%
Total	14	17	10	7	100%

The findings in Table 3 explore a tone imbalance in Nigerian newspaper coverage of politics, with a dominant negative outlook and almost no positive or neutral representation. The implication of these findings shows a media landscape that is critical and vigilant, but may also have the potential for public cynicism and unbalanced discourse.

Table 4: Frequency Table Showing Perception of Newspaper Framing of Political Issues

Factors	Options	N	%
Do you think newspapers influence how political issues are understood in Nigeria?	Yes	189	50.0
	No	166	43.9
	Not sure	23	6.0
To what extent do newspaper reports shape your opinion on political issues?	Very greatly	151	39.9
	Moderately	139	36.7
	Slightly	65	17.1
	Not at all	23	6.0
Which type of political stories catch your attention the most in newspapers?	Campaign coverage	89	23.5



	Corruption scandals	109	28.8
	Electoral violence	96	25.3
	Policy debates	69	18.2
	Personality profiles	15	3.9
Do you believe newspapers are objective in their political coverage?	Always	88	23.2
	Sometimes	159	42.0
	Rarely	69	18.2
	Never	62	16.4
Have you ever changed your opinion about a political issue or candidate after reading a newspaper report?	Yes	278	73.5
	No	56	14.8
	Can't say	46	12.1
What aspect of newspaper framing do you find most influential?	Headlines	111	29.3
	Photographs	58	15.3
	Editorials	44	11.6
	News content	123	32.5
	Infographics/Charts	42	11.1

Table 4 presents data on participants' perceptions of newspaper framing of political issues. It was discovered that the majority of participants believe that newspaper content significantly influences how political issues are understood and how their opinion is expressed. Further findings showed that corruption scandals and electoral violence were more attention-grabbing compared to political stories. However, the majority of the respondents indicated that they had changed their opinion on a political issue or a candidate after reading a newspaper's content.

Table 5. Frequency Table Showing Interpretation and Response to Framed Political Narratives

Factors	Options	N	%
How do you usually respond to political stories in newspapers?	Discuss with others	189	50.0
	Share on social media	106	28.0
	Ignore	54	14.2
	Take action	29	7.6
How likely are you to trust political stories in newspapers that align with your beliefs?	Very likely	133	35.1
	Somewhat likely	97	25.6
	Not likely	64	16.9
	Not sure	84	22.2
In your opinion, are political issues in newspapers framed differently for different audiences?	Yes	89	23.5
	No	66	17.4
	Not sure	223	58.9
Do you believe your demographic background influences how you interpret political stories in newspapers?	Yes	71	18.7
	No	155	41.0
	Maybe	152	40.2

Table 5 above presents data on participants' interpretation and responses to framed political narratives in newspapers. Findings indicate active engagement with political news reports. Further findings revealed participants' tendency to trust political stories that align with their existing beliefs. Lastly, the findings show that most participants do not believe their demographic



background, such as age, gender, education, or ethnicity etc. influences how they interpret political stories.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide important evidence about the ways selected Nigerian newspapers constructed political news during 2024 and how newspaper readers in Osun State perceived those representations. The first objective examined the dominant frames used by *The Punch*, *The Vanguard*, *The Nation* and *The Guardian* in reporting political news between January and December 2024. Results indicate conflict and economic-consequence frames to be prominent frames, while responsibility, morality and human-interest occurred less frequently. The distribution also reveals substantial differences across newspapers, with *The Punch* and *The Guardian* recording particularly high frequencies of conflict and economic-consequence frames. The prominence of conflict framing is understandable within the political and socioeconomic environment of Nigeria during the study period. Political reporting in Nigeria frequently occurs within a highly competitive environment in which disagreements among political parties, political actors and government institutions provide readily identifiable news events. Conflict also possesses strong news-value characteristics because it is dramatic, immediate and capable of generating competing claims. Consequently, political disagreements may receive greater journalistic attention than less dramatic processes such as policy implementation, institutional negotiation or incremental governance. Thus, findings align with Ajetunmobi (2023), who identified conflict-driven framing as a recurring feature of Nigerian newspaper coverage of sociopolitical issues. It also corresponds with the findings of Abdulazeez et al. (2024), who observed political othering and competing narratives in newspaper coverage of the 2023 presidential elections.

The consistency across these studies suggests that conflict framing is not simply an isolated characteristic of the 2024 coverage examined in this study. However, the relatively high frequency of the economic-consequence frame adds an important dimension to the existing literature. Its prominence can plausibly be linked to the economic pressures confronting Nigerians during 2024, particularly the consequences of inflation, fuel-price increases, currency pressures and the wider cost-of-living crisis. Political issues were consequently not reported only as contests between political elites; they were also connected to their perceived consequences for citizens' economic well-being. This interpretation is particularly relevant because the 2024 political environment included significant public concern about economic hardship and protests over living costs. The finding also supports Abwami and Shahid (2024), who found strong episodic framing in coverage of the fuel-subsidy removal, with human-interest, responsibility and morality frames receiving comparatively less attention. The present finding of a strong economic-consequence frame is compatible with that pattern because both suggest that the economic consequences of government decisions became an important interpretive device in political reporting. The difference is that the present study examines political news more broadly across an entire year rather than concentrating on one policy controversy.

The second objective examined the major political themes represented in the selected newspapers. Governance and elections were the most prominent themes. The prominence of governance is particularly noteworthy because it indicates that political journalism during 2024 was concerned not only with elections and partisan competition but also with the performance and activities of government. This is understandable within a political environment in which citizens



were closely evaluating government decisions against their everyday experiences. Economic hardship, public policy and questions of governmental responsibility made governance a politically consequential subject. The finding broadly agrees with previous Nigerian research. Abdulazeez et al. (2024) found that election-related political narratives occupied an important position in newspaper coverage, while studies of Nigerian electoral communication have repeatedly identified elections, political candidates and leadership evaluation as central areas of newspaper attention. At the same time, the relatively lower proportion of corruption coverage deserves closer interpretation. Corruption is a persistent issue in Nigerian public discourse, yet it constituted only a lesser percentage of the political themes coded in this study. This does not necessarily mean that corruption was considered unimportant. Rather, its lower frequency may indicate that corruption becomes more prominent when specific scandals, investigations or political controversies provide newsworthy events. In other words, public importance and media frequency are not necessarily equivalent. This finding also cautions against interpreting newspaper content exclusively through an agenda-setting perspective. A low frequency of corruption stories does not necessarily mean that readers considered corruption unimportant, just as a high frequency of governance stories does not guarantee that readers interpreted governance positively. Framing Theory is more useful here because it draws attention to the manner in which an issue is constructed once it enters the news. The same corruption issue, for example, can be framed as individual misconduct, institutional failure, partisan persecution or evidence of systemic governance problems.

The third objective examined the tone of newspaper coverage towards political actors and issues. The results indicate a clear predominance of negative tone, while positive and neutral tones were extremely limited in the coded material. A negative tone should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of poor journalism. In democratic societies, critical reporting can perform an important watchdog function by scrutinising political actors, exposing failures and drawing public attention to government shortcomings. From this perspective, the predominance of negative coverage may reflect the press performing its accountability role rather than simply engaging in sensationalism. Nevertheless, the near absence of positive and neutral representations raises a concern about balance. If political actors are overwhelmingly presented through negative narratives, audiences may develop an understanding of politics in which failure, conflict and misconduct appear to be the defining characteristics of political life. This is especially important when a negative tone occurs alongside the strong conflict frame identified in the study. Faleye and Olukotun (2020) emphasised the role of media narratives in shaping perceptions of political accountability, while the literature on conflict reporting cautions against excessive reliance on sensational or one-sided narratives.

The fourth objective examined how newspaper readers in Osun State perceived political framing. Findings reveal a complex audience response rather than simple acceptance of newspaper messages. A significant percentage of the respondents believed that newspapers influence how political issues are understood, while others indicated differently. The relatively close division between respondents who recognised newspaper influence and those who did not is theoretically important. It suggests that readers do not constitute a homogeneous audience. The finding becomes more compelling when considered alongside respondents' reported behaviour. A significant percentage indicated a change in opinion about a political issue or candidate after reading a newspaper report. The results also show that corruption scandals and electoral violence attracted



more attention than campaign coverage, policy debates and personality profiles. This corresponds closely with the content-analysis finding that conflict was one of the most dominant frames. The convergence is analytically significant: the types of political stories that receive attention from readers overlap with the kinds of politically dramatic events that are prominent within newspaper framing. One of the most theoretically significant findings concerns respondents' tendency to trust political stories that align with their existing beliefs. This finding provides strong support for the incorporation of Perception Theory into the study. It demonstrates that audience interpretation is not simply a function of the content of the message. Existing beliefs act as a filter through which political information is evaluated. Readers may therefore regard a newspaper report as credible partly because it confirms what they already believe about a political actor or issue.

Conclusion

This study concludes that newspaper coverage of political news in Nigeria is characterised predominantly by conflict and economic-consequence frames, with governance and electoral issues receiving the greatest thematic attention. The findings further show that readers in Osun State recognise the role of newspapers in shaping their understanding of political issues, although their responses indicate that such influence is neither uniform nor deterministic. Readers' existing beliefs and perceptions play an important role in how political news is interpreted, particularly in determining which reports they trust and how they respond to them. The study contributes to existing knowledge by demonstrating the importance of examining media framing and audience perception together. While Framing Theory explains how newspapers construct and emphasise particular meanings in political news, Perception Theory helps explain why readers may interpret those representations differently. The findings therefore suggest that newspaper framing provides important interpretive cues within the political information environment, but does not independently determine public opinion. The findings provide a basis for recommending more balanced and contextual political reporting, greater attention to citizens' experiences and policy consequences, and stronger media-literacy efforts to enable audiences to critically evaluate politically framed information.

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