



## Reporting Terrorism in the era of Politics and Electioneering in Nigeria

PATRICK UKIM INEJI, BIBIANA U. INEJI  
Cross River University of Technology, Nigeria

**Abstract.** Terrorism is a serious global social phenomenon which has assumed a pandemic dimension. International bodies such as European Union and United Nations have expressed concern about phenomenal rise of terrorists' activities with unanimous agreement that terrorism is a deliberate act by an individual or group against a country, its institution or its people. The study is anchored on Agenda setting and Framing theories of the media and relies on archival materials, extant literature and media reports in the contemporary Nigeria environment. Terrorism may be triggered by unfair treatment meted out to individual, groups, or institutions, poverty, unequal distribution and utilization of resources, oppression and suppression of the less privileged members or groups in society, etc. Reporting terrorism is a hard nut to crack on the part of the reporter who is entangled in the precarious terrain of the area of assignment and the media organization he/she is working for. The reporter sometimes finds himself/herself in a dilemma as he is faced with the task of reporting facts (not fiction) amid ensuring that the media organization is not offended. The priority of the reporter should be to get the fact of the story and present it in an unbiased and objective manner devoid of suspicion. The impact of terrorism on the citizenry is enormous. Aside the loss in human lives, it can damage its economic, political and social fabrics of the nation. At the professional plank, many journalists have lost their lives in the cause of reporting terrorist acts. The study recommends the reduction of poverty, inequality, promotion of justice and fairness and the rule of law, greater participation in governance, and improvement in intelligence gathering among others.

**Keywords:** Terrorism, reportage, poverty, participatory governance, democracy.

### 1. Introduction

Terrorism is a serious global social phenomenon with enormous social implications on nations. International bodies such as European Union and United Nations have expressed concern about phenomenal rise of terrorists' activities with its attendant negative consequences on nations' political, economic and social fabrics (Vincent, 2007, p.210). Terrorism may be triggered by unfair treatment meted out to individuals, groups, or institution, poverty, unequal distribution of resources, oppression and suppression of the less privileged members or groups in the society by the powers that be. Deliberate efforts by victims of the oppressed, poverty, injustice, unfair treatments to avenge may be the compelling reasons why they may resort to terrorism as a way of responding to the aggressor's mischievous and wicked acts against them.

Terrorism has inflicted fear and peace has been greatly undermined in families, churches, institutions of learning, government offices and communities. In fact, the fear of terrorist acts have become the beginning of wisdom in Nigeria. It has become difficult for Nigerians to sleep with two eyes closed because of activities of terrorists among farming communities, especially in Northern Nigeria. This has been aggravated by activities of herdsmen who killed innocent farmers and rape their wives at the slightest provocation. In fact, it has become normal for aggrieved communities to abandon their ancestral homes for fear of being exterminated by the invading herdsmen. In Churches and Mosques, the killing of worshippers during religious services has become common place.

Reporting terrorism is a hard nut to crack as the reporter is entangled in the precarious terrain of the

area of assignments and the media organization the reporter is working for. The reporter sometimes finds himself in a dilemma as he is confronted with the task of reporting facts ensuring that the media organization is not offended. The priority of the reporter should be to exercise utmost responsibility in his reportage as he has a stake in the peace and tranquility of the society.

Reporting terrorism is a sensitive issue which requires tact on the part of the reporter because; terrorists rely on media coverage to amplify their gruesome deeds. Exercising constraints by the reporter to mitigate terrorist activities therefore becomes imperative.

## 2. Reviews of Literature

It is necessary to explain a number of concepts and terms that are pertinent to the understanding of this discourse.

### **Terrorism defined:**

Although terrorism takes different definitions, there is a unanimity in its opinion depending on the perpetrators and terrorist acts. Bodies such as the European Union and United Nations have drafted statements and policies defining terrorism. They agreed that terrorism is a deliberate act by an individual or group against a country, its institutions, or its people. The intent is to damage its economic, political and social configuration. Under such a rubric terrorism is that which is directed against countries. Other uses are conveniently side stepped (Vincent, 2007, p.261).

***Terrorism may take either of two shapes:*** state terrorism – when governments are the aggressors or state and non state dimension. Governments may sometimes participate in terrorists' acts which may not be publicly pronounced. Those who perceive themselves as marginalized or oppressed/suppressed will engage in acts of terrorism. Incidents of terrorism have been in the increase in recent times and will likely continue as long as it appears to be the available options for the marginalized and oppressed in different climes. It is even worse, especially that most terrorists are hardly captured and some terrorist acts have political undertone.

Sometimes, security personnel are compromised and leak intelligence connive or collaborate surreptitiously to unleash mayhem on innocent citizens. It is believed and has been proven that ransom payments are shared with the security

personnel and chief negotiator. They have been many confessions where arrested terrorists named the military as chief sources of weapon supply. The recent jail break in Abuja Kuje Prisons where the Minister publicly admitted that there was intelligence report a couple of days alluding to the jail break but was ignored before the incidence is a case in point. Umueri and Galadima (2012, p.3) say terrorism is the use of violence for political aims or to force the government to acct. Citing Schlesinger *et al.*, (1983), terrorism is perceived as bad and must be tackled in a way even without following democratic or legal procedure. They further aver that:

Terrorism has become a common place in the Nigerian Clime. Apart from the Nigerian Civil war, terrorism was not common in Nigeria until about October, 19, 1986 when a renowned investigative journalist, Dele Giwa of the *News Watch* Magazine was killed with a parcel bomb in his residence in Lagos. Since then there have been pockets of bomb blast in some parts of the country but it assumed a larger dimension of very wide scale of dangerous magnitude with the killing of Mohammed Yusuf, the sect leader of Boko Haram by the police. His death marked a new phase in terrorism in Nigeria. Since then, Nigeria has not known peace and the situation has been compounded by the poor economic state of the nation. Thus, the introduction of kidnapping for ransom by bandits and insurgents has been largely attributed to business for survival. The implication is that, there is more to terrorism other than religious coloration (Ekhareato & Olley, 2012, p.84). Lending credence to the view cited by Ekhareato & Olley, (2012, p.84), Imobighe (2002) avers that: Terrorists themselves see their acts as legal pursuit of political ends. They also add that terrorism is the use of violence to oppress or suppress opposing voices on one hand and the use of violence against the government and people in a geographical location for selfish reasons on Developments regarding their activities suggest that the quest for power or the failure of their leaders to get maximum benefits from the political system appears to be the remote cause of the groups' emergence and terrorist activities. This same reason can be adduced for the formation and activities of terrorist groups around the world.

He further states that:

*Structural factors such as economic, social and political issues relating to wealth distribution and inter-ethnic relation, facilitating factors which include the degree.*

Terrorism is associated with propaganda when it is used as a tool to influence public opinion formation. When it is approved by the government, it is referred to as state terrorism, but when the message emanates from a non-governmental group, it is called non-state terrorism. Non-state terrorism is an alternative for diplomacy. This view is strengthened by Vincent (2007, p. 256) who avers that:

*non-state terrorism is carried out by a collection of social and political players and propaganda as a channel for alternative diplomacy. Sometimes, smaller state actors may become involved but normally in clandestine ways. The players at the forefront are almost always non-state entities that feel terrorism is an alternative way to counter better-equipped states of multi-national industry interests.*

Terrorists' activities in Nigeria are greatly influenced by the aforementioned. This can be attributed to the havoc unleashed on the masses in Nigeria by the rising tempo of insurgence and banditry in the northern part of the country. The rising incidents of kidnapping for ransom are largely influenced by the clandestine and evil activities of bandits, herdsmen and some disgruntled elements in the society.

Terrorism may be perceived differently by different segments of the society depending on orientation, ideology and goal the terrorist act may serve the aggressors or perpetrators of the act. In this regard, a genuine military operation targeted to defend the territorial integrity of the nation may be labeled a terrorist act by the victims. Vincent (2007, p.256) aligns with this view when he states:

Sometimes a bonafide military uprising may be called an act of terrorism.... Clearly, the rebels found in the early American colonies saw themselves as freedom fighters, whereas the British perceived them as something akin to irritating terrorists. As noted earlier, "one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter"

Vincent (2007, p. 256) further cites Rourke (1999) who explained that what constitutes terrorism is in the eyes of the beholder. The foregoing explains that terrorism is complete and laced with political and religious undertones. Terrorism has metamorphosed into different contexts since its emergence (Vincent, 2007, p.256), tracing the origin of the term avers that:

*The term terrorism first entered in European languages after the French revolution of 1789. In early years, it was largely through violence that French governments tried to impose a radical new order on suspicious and reluctant public. Consequently, from the very beginning, we find that terrorism was acknowledged as a form of control that*

*could be imposed by a dictatorial government against its own subjects.*

He further avers that:

*In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the term terrorism became associated with non-governmental movements. For many years, terrorism continued mostly through the assassination of leaders, such as the killing of Australia, Archduke Ferdinand by a 19-year old Bosnian Serb student in Saragero on June 28, 1914.*

By the 20<sup>th</sup> century, terrorism had expanded beyond assassination of political leaders and head of states. European colonial powers saw pressure to withdraw from colonies such as that which happened in Ireland. The Easter rebellion on Easter Monday, April 24<sup>th</sup>, 1916, marked the uprising of Irish nationalists against the British. Some 16 men were executed in the British immediately or soon after the rebellion (Vincent, 2007 p. 257).

Another form of terrorism emerged as indigenous populations began to advance support for the leadership claims in emerging post-colonial states in the height of political independence. Even after the withdrawal of European control in their colonies, terrorism continued in many places, personified in the killing of police and local official, aircraft hijackings, hostage taking and bombings. Causes championed by terrorists rested on revolutionary socialism and nationalism as well as religion. Vincent, 2007 further states:

*The close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw a new form of religious cultural-based terrorism emerge under the direction of Osama bin Laden. The Arab-born freedom fighter who had once been trained by the United States for battle against the Soviets in Afghanistan became leader of a fairly small Islamic group known as Al-Qaeda (The Base). Al-Qaeda Muslim extremism provided an interpretation of Islam that arguably rationalized the killing of military, government officials, and civilians.*

### 3. Theoretical Framework

This article is anchored on three relevant theories: structural conflict theory, framing theory of the media and social responsibility media theory.

Structural conflict theory holds that conflict stems from the ways societies are structured and organized. In other words, conflict is a product or outgrowth of the nature the society is patterned and organized. According to this theory, the society is patterned into two broad categories, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

The bourgeoisie is a minute entity but exercises more power and influence on the larger category, the proletariat because they control the means of production and distribution in the society. The proletariat are the masses who bear the brunt of exploitation, injustice, poverty disease etc. in other word; the masses survive at the mercy of the bourgeoisie.

The proletariat play second fiddle. The implication is that economic exclusion, injustice, poverty, disease, exploitation and other forms of deprivations are the sources of conflict in society. The theory argues that conflicts are predicated on the consequences of the exploitation, domination, suppression, oppression, injustice and man inhumanity to man as a whole. As can be argued in this discourse, the relevance of this theory is hinged on the fact that terrorism is rooted in conflicts and structural imbalance of the society.

Framing theory in mass communication refers to how the media packages and presents information to the public. According to the theory, the media highlights certain events and then places them within a particular context to encourage or discourage certain interpretations. The implication is that the media exercises a selective influence over how people view reality. Anthropologist Gregory Pateson is credited with first posting the theory in 1972. Framing is an extension of the Agenda Setting Theory and is sometimes referred to as second-level agenda setting because of its close relation to Agenda-setting.

***Framing theory is hinged on the following assumptions:***

Journalists select the topics they will present and decide how they will be presented. This determines the issues audiences think about and how they think

Audiences interpret information through their own frames. Audiences' frames may overlap or contradict the media's frames.

Journalists must choose which events to cover or which to ignore. They must decide which facts; values and perspectives will be mentioned or given prominence. This means journalists apply their own interpretative frames when packaging news. Reporters are influenced by social norms, pressure, many interest groups, journalistic routines and their own ideological or political orientations. As a result, some evaluations contained within news reports are promoted over others. This affects audiences by limiting how they perceive and interpret events.

Since reporting terrorism is hinged on how the media packages and present terrorist acts in the news room and this goes a long way in determining how

audiences perceive and think about terrorist issues, the framing theory of the media is relevant in understanding the views of the audience members in terrorist related issues.

The social responsibility media theory is hinged on the premise that media practitioners should be socially responsible in that they have a stake in the stability and well being of the society in which they operate. The assumptions of social responsibility media theory include the fact that everyone should individually work for the good of the society; everyone is able to make a change for the better; one person can make a difference.

Social responsibility is ethics that guide any action, be it media or other obligations. The theory assumes that the press which has enormous responsibilities to discharge must do so with utmost responsibility and caution knowing that it has a duty to preserve democracy and inform the public based on the society's needs and interests.

The theory is relevant in that the media should observe ethical standards by being truthful and fair in the interest of the public in their reportage and exercise restraint for public good, knowing that they have a stake in the stability and well-being of the society.

#### **4. Causes of Terrorism**

Many factors are at the centre of terrorism in Nigeria in particular and globally. They range from ethno-religious, political, economic, inequality, poverty, injustice, oppression and suppression of smaller and less privileged groups by the majority and superior groups in the society.

Most terrorist activities have been fuelled by unresolved political issues. For instance, continued terrorism in the Middle-East has persisted as a way to battle Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. The Israelis with superior military weapons have often resorted to heavy handed attacks on Palestinians which have often been responded to by Palestinian act of terrorism. Unfortunately, the United States has been supportive of the Israeli position while most Middle-East neighbours and Arabic nations have been critical. Similarly, in Nigeria, the terrorist activities of IPOB (Independent People of Biafra) have been hinged on political injustice and marginalization meted out to the Igbos since the civil war.

Religion is also at the centre of terrorism. The close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a new form of religious/cultural

based terrorism emerged, spearheaded by Osama bin Laden. The Arab-born freedom fighter, who was trained by the United State for battle against the Soviets in Afghanistan became leader of a fairly small Islamic group known as Al-Qaeda. This religious sect of Muslim Extremism provided a justification of Islam that arguably rationalized the killing of military, government officials and civilians. All these Al-Qaeda perceive as oppressive Western Forces seeking to dominate Muslim countries were targets of the sect.

Locally speaking, the activities of Boko Haram Muslim sect are largely attributed to religion. Boko Haram (Western Education is sinful) sees itself as a religion reformist. The group which was formed in 2002 has used violence to unleash carnage in the country since 2009 when its activities became intensified. The situation worsened with the killing of their leader Mohammed Yusuf.

Domination and suppression of the smaller groups by the larger and politically powerful group could be responsible for terrorism both at the global and local levels. A case in point is in Sudan where they have a backlash against a government dominated by Muslim Arabs, a war that borders largely on racial, religious and regional differences. The war against the government which is dominated by the northern region has been sustained by the southern portion which is predominantly black. Christians in Nigeria, particularly in the North Central typified by Benue, Taraba, Nassarawa, and Plateau states, terrorism has taken the form of herdsmen-farmers clashes with many lives and properties destroyed. Kaduna state in the North-Western part of the country is not left out. In this banditry and insurgencies, many families have been wiped out as a result of the clashes.

The recent invasion of Ukraine by the Russian forces is a typical instance of a more technologically powerful country unleashing violence on the less powerful country. Terrorism in the Russian-Ukraine war is a sheer exhibition of untamed imperialistic ambition of Russia to annex some of the territories of Ukraine. The Ukraine-Russian war is a manifestation of dictatorial tendencies usually unleashed by the powerful nations on the smaller and less powerful nations.

The media can aggravate terrorist act by their reportage. This view is shared by Vincent (2007, p. 264) who avers that:

*....through the use of modern communication media, bin Laden has reached a level of influence that few countries have ever been able achieve. This*

*demonstrates the power of the so-called "fear factor"....*

Generally speaking, terrorism has been fuelled globally and nationally by global inequalities and the imbalance in power, poverty, injustice and dictatorship and disregard for democratic tenets.

Terrorism in Nigeria has been heightened by security operatives. This is compounded by poor knowledge of security intelligence by security operatives, especially the police and other military personnel at check-points. Issues of terrorism have been in the increase in Nigeria as a result of police and other military personnel who killed at the slightest provocation. A recent case is the killing of Mrs. Omobolanle Raheem, a Lagos-based Lawyer by an Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP). Drambi Vindi, the officer attached to the Ajah Divisional Headquarters of the Lagos State Police Command. Cases of unwarranted killing citizens of innocent killers and extra-judicial killings by security personnel at road or security checks abound in Nigeria.

### **5. Media Reportage in the Era of politics and Electioneering**

The operation and practice of the press in any society is based on the political, religious, cultural beliefs and economic conditions of that society. It is dynamic and takes into consideration the political situation of the society in which it operates. But media practitioners like other human beings in the society are prone to several temptations and influences: These range from newsroom tradition, political or ideological orientations, ethno-religious interests, business interests, etc and these impose enormous constraints on the media practitioners to take a crucial decision which may make or mar the society.

Regardless of the final outcome of the story on terrorism, the way the public perceives the story depends ultimately on who writes the story. But public sentiments may arise and will be influenced by the way the story is packaged and presented by the reportage.

The job of a reporter is worsen in the era of political and electioneering where every bid of the reporter or media is perceived and interpreted with political connotations, while the government in power perceives and interprets every step of the media as politically motivated no matter the level of objectivity and truthfulness embedded in the terrorist

story especially if the story impinges on the incompetence and shortcoming of the government. Unfortunately, while the sitting government is on the defensive, the opposition would always put it on their toes. The reporter's role becomes very sensitive and crucial for public perception and reaction.

Terrorists may be encouraged or discouraged to intensify their acts depending on media reportage. This view synchronizes with Vincent (2007, p.262) who avers that:

*Terrorists have relied on media coverage in response to their gruesome deeds. It is through such coverage that these acts gain enormous power. Recognizing this power, the British government has also made it illegal for any broadcaster to air interviews with IRA members and their families.*

Blame war has presently existed between the government and the opposition and this is likely to escalate in this season of election of political office holders – the presidency, national assembly, governors and state legislatures. The question now is: where does the terrorism reporter stand amid the precarious political circumstances he/she finds himself? From available indices, reporting insurgency, banditry and terrorism in general has not been the problem of the media in general as media have been at its best according to Ekwueme and Akpan (2012, p.49-50) who affirm this view:

*The media have in the performance of the duties of informing and educating the audience reported the sect's armed insurrection against the people of Nigeria in all its gory details. Even with the acclaimed power of the mass media to influence public opinion, group's activities have not just continued but become more deadly as they target high-profile government officials, police officers as well as anybody who voices criticisms against them.*

It is this continuous and unabated terrorism in the country that concerns have been raised about the problems of the mass media to curb the excesses of terrorism and a call for a change in strategy. It has also been observed that media reportage of terrorist acts may trigger more acts of terrorism by terrorist groups or potential terrorists who would be galvanized or motivated to engage in terrorism. This view aligns with Ineji (2011, p. 64-65):

*People with similar interests are usually linked to others...but the negative consequence is that, persons with anti-social interests can be linked as easy as possible thereby creating havoc for the society. It is also possible that media attention to terrorists and other anti-social groups might prompt others in the same way.*

The media constitute very important channels for the escalation or aggravation of terrorism. This could be desperation to sway public opinion in their reportage. Some world leaders affirm this position thus as Vincent, (2007, p.20-29) affirms.

*Even President Bush conceded during a December 20, 2004 press conference.... "Car bombs are effective propaganda tools." Likewise, the terrorist involved in planning and carrying out attacks of 9/11 undoubtedly counted on the extensive playtime on televisions and presence on the front pages of newspapers worldwide (Vincent, 2007, p.262).*

From the foregoing, it may be safely said that sensational reportage by the media, both traditional (conventional media) might have aggravated terrorist acts in many countries of the world. The question is: has the Nigerian media reportage been objective, accurate, fair and unbiased? Has the media given a full and comprehensive account of insecurity in this country? Is the opposition fair in criticizing the federal government on insecurity? Have the media been neutral and objective in reporting terrorism. In the era of politics and electioneering requires tact, maturity, responsibility and responsiveness on the part of the mass media. How did the media handle the Kuje jail break? Intelligence report has it that security agencies were aware of the planned jail break. How did the media report on the issue? The media are susceptible to allegation of bias by government and the opposition. Media practitioners reporting terrorism must be above board if their reportage has to be credible.

## **6. Addressing the Terrorism Reportage Challenge in Nigeria**

One way of mitigating terrorism challenge is to stop glorifying terrorist activities by the mass media since it has been ascertained that terrorists often relied on media coverage to intensify their gruesome deeds. More often than not, gory details of acts of terrorism seem to have emboldened terrorists and potential terrorists to display their insidious acts.

There is need for re-orientation and perception about perpetrators of terrorism who believe it is a proper alternative to or a way to right injustice and unfair treatment meted out by oppressors.

Another way to curtailing terrorism is to play down on ethno-religious sentiments. Terrorism will reduce to the barest minimum if religious extremists and fanatics imbibe the spirit of religious tolerance. This would also dissuade governments from taking actions predicated on religious imperatives.

Terrorist act may be drastically reduced at the global and national levels if deliberate efforts are geared towards the promotion of equitable governance policies and eradicating poverty as some of the incidents of terrorism (kidnapping and abduction) are encouraged by the payment of ransom by victims to satisfy the kidnapers.

Also, increase access to communication technologies which could easily give information on terrorist acts may help the quickly nip in the bud issues and acts of terrorism. There is need for governments to deliberately put in measures that would improve the welfare of the populace if poverty and inequalities are reduced. There is no doubt that part of the solution to terrorism would have been achieved.

### 7. Summary and Conclusion

Terrorism is a serious global phenomenon with enormous social implications on nations. Concerns have been raised about phenomenal rise of terrorists' activities with its attendant negative consequences on nations' political, economic and social fabrics. Terrorism has taken a great toll on Nigerian society and activities of terrorists have been fueled by banditry, insurgency, farmer-herdsmen clashes, kidnapping etc. terrorism has integrated all fabrics of the society, including places of worships (churches and mosques).

Reporting terrorists' activities by the mass media is a herculean task as media practitioners find themselves in a precarious situation because of intervening factors-political and ideological orientation, business interests, ethno-religious considerations etc.

It has been argued that activities of terrorists have been aggravated by poverty, inequality, injustice, suppression and oppression by the privileged class and revenge by the smaller and deprived segments of the society. To tame the monster, concerted efforts and measures must be put in place to redress the ugly trend among which are government efforts to address poverty, improvements in communication technologies and imbibing a sense of patriotism, responsibility and responsiveness by the mass media.

### References

Ekhareafu, O. D., & Olley, O. W (2012), "Global Terrorism: Fighting the Media way" in *The Media, Terrorism & Political Communication in Nigeria*, in D. Wilson African Council for Communication

Education (ACCE, 2012). Uyo: African Council for Communication Education (ACCE), Nigerian Chapter.

Ekwueme, A. C. & Akpan, C. (2012), "Mass Media and Boko Haram Insurrection: A Call for Reportorial Paradigm Shift," in Wilson, D (Ed.), *The Media, Terrorism & Political Communication in Nigeria*, 2012. Uyo: African Council for Communication Education (ACCE), Nigerian Chapter, 2012).

Ineji, P. U. (2011), *Mass Communication: The Basics*. Calabar: Ugomma Printers.

Umuerri, A., Galadima, J. D. (2012), "Mass Media Development of National Security and Strategic Communication Against Terrorism," In D. Wilson (Ed.), *The Media, Terrorism & Political Communication in Nigeria*. African Council for Communication Education (ACCE, 2012).

Vincent, R. C. (2007). "Global Communication and Propaganda" in Kamalipour, Y. R. (Editor), *Global Communication*, Second Edition. Belmont: Thomson Wadsworth.