

Assessing Argumentation in Nigeria's 2015 election-related news editorials

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DOI: 10.29322/IJSRP.8.8.2018.p8055

<http://dx.doi.org/10.29322/IJSRP.8.8.2018.p8055>

Abstract- The success of Nigeria's 2015 general elections was unanticipated, judging by the tense political and security atmosphere in which the polls were conducted. It is against this backdrop that this study explores the contribution of four Nigerian newspapers (The Guardian, Vanguard, Independent and Leadership) and, in particular, their editorials, to the reasonably peaceful and mostly credible 2015 general elections in Nigeria. This qualitative study, located within the interpretivist tradition, draws on textual analysis of selected editorials to explore three strands of appeals: – violence-free polls, rational voting and credible electoral process made by these editorials. Drawing from the theories of argumentation, the research suggests that three kinds (forensic, epideictic and deliberative) and three modes of argumentation (logos, pathos and ethos) were used by editorial writers to advance their arguments. These newspaper editorials made moral and ethical appeals urging “supra-national” and patriotic attitudes as well as process interventions. This study thus argues that in view of the range of issues discussed and the level of persuasion, the editorials played a positive role in the peaceful outcome of 2015 polls in Nigeria.

Index Terms- editorials; rhetorical analysis; argumentation; election; Nigeria

I. INTRODUCTION

Elections are integral part of any democratic process, providing a mechanism for leadership succession and change. Election is seen as a means towards the attainment of political power in democracies as it (democracy) is founded on aggregation and articulation of people's interest (Awopeju, 2012). In developed democracies, citizens use their vote or lobby (Becker, 1983) to advance their interests (Collier and Vicente, 2014; Adebayo and Omotola, 2007). However, in many new democratic states, especially in low-income countries of Africa, elections are still considered a do-or-die affair (Tar and Zack-Williams, 2007). Ideally, elections should be heralded by a period of campaigning characterised by peaceful and persuasive discourse wherein candidates vie for popular vote by advancing reasoned arguments as to why they are the best suitably qualified candidates for the elective position (Bratton, 2008). It is to be noted, however, that elections in Africa represent struggle over access to state resources (Bratton, 2008; Lindberg, 2006). Within Nigerian political milieu, elections are seen by politicians as zero-sum game in which the winner takes all (Dode and Edet, 2015). In view of these high stakes, politicians employ several

means – by hook or crook – to achieve electoral victory (Bratton, 2008). As Collier and Rohner (2008) suggest, low levels of democratic development significantly increases the propensity for civil conflict. This cannot be truer than in Africa which has witnessed rising cases of political intimidation and violence at elections as exemplified in Kenya, Zimbabwe and Nigeria.

Since the return of democracy in 1999, Nigeria has had five general elections with varying degrees of successes and failures. However, the 2015 general election marked a watershed in Nigeria's democratic development. It was the first time the then ruling party, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the then opposition party, All Progressives Congress (APC) mustered relatively equal political strength. Two events culminated in boosting the political strength of the opposition party. First, the formation of All progressives Congress (APC) through a merger of five political parties namely the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), the All Nigerian People's Party (ANPP) and a faction of the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) led by Rochas Okorochoa, the Imo State governor to rival the then ruling party (Owen and Usman, 2015). The second event was the defection of five PDP governors to the newly-formed APC (Owen and Usman, 2015). The dominance which the PDP previously enjoyed was significantly undercut. In their race for electoral victory, the two main political parties threatened the peace of the nation. Far from issue-based campaigns, the two parties deployed “negative campaign tactics involving fierce personal attacks on the candidates and prominent party members” (Orji, 2015:77). Besides, long term political rivalry between the north and south was revived during this time. The contest took on ethno-religious coloration as PDP fielded President Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian from the south as her presidential candidate while the Muhammadu Buhari, a Muslim from the north was APC's standard-bearer (Dode and Edet, 2015). Disturbing levels of unguarded statements pervaded the political space while violent attacks from the two main political parties increased (NHRC, 2015). The 2015 polls in Nigeria were held in the midst of simmering political tension between the two dominant political parties. It should be borne in mind, however, that the Nigerian newspapers did not watch the nation descend into anarchy without doing anything. Instead, they made spirited interventions through their editorials to stem the spate of violence and ensure a free and fair poll this paper, therefore seeks to appraise how newspaper editorials persuaded relevant stakeholder to toe the path of peace and ensure credible election. This study is particularly interested in examining how Nigerian editorials

argued for free and fair polls 2015 elections in Nigeria. What kinds of argumentation did they employ to make their case persuasive? What are the rhetorical strategies mobilised in these editorials to make their arguments persuasive? This work proceeds by discussing editorials and argumentation, an overview of rhetorical analysis, data presentation and analysis.

Editorials and Argumentation

Newspaper editorial is the serious analysis of important, often current, issues so that the paper's "ideal reader" will, either, be informed, influenced or entertained (Kriehbaum, 1956). It is the newspaper's considered opinion on an issue which it judges as important. Editorials have, over the years, enjoyed a prominent place in a newspaper. In fact, it is only newspaper content that is attributed to the paper as its own opinion on any given matter. As a corporate citizen, newspapers use the agency of editorials in assisting other citizens to contribute meaningfully to communal progress (Ukonu, 2007). They achieve this purpose by incorporating investigative, interpretive, hard news reporting and advocacy skills into their editorials (Ukonu, 2007) to the end that the reader may be educated, entertained or influenced. The editorial remains the only newspaper content through which a newspaper can exert influence in shaping public discourse on a given subject. The need for newspaper editorials, Ukonu (2007) argues, is highest in times of crisis, tension or uncertainty as readers turn to them for guidance to negotiate complexities of modern life.

For editorials to exert such influence as stated above, it must be persuasive. As Perloff (2003) points out, persuasion entails a deliberate effort at influencing the other party, along with an accompanying understanding that the persuadee possesses a mental state that is amenable to change. Though persuasion and argumentation do not have the same meaning, Ukonu (2007) argues that they are better used interchangeably because they have a common function which is to convince the audience to accept certain perspectives. This view is underpinned by different ways in which editorial is used. For instance, editorials, according to Bal and Saint-Dizier (2009), fall under persuasive texts. Such types of texts, they explain, seek to persuade the reader in regard to certain kinds of topics. For his part, van Dijk (1995) notes that editorials are argumentative in language and structure. This study, therefore, applies both terms in this sense. Ben (2012) posits that the act of arguing performs two main functions which are critical to humans as rational and social beings. First, argumentation provides a way of knowing because it is the means through which we justify our claims. In doing this, we try to demonstrate that our views are correct in certain respects and it is within the purview of an audience to accept it or not. Again, argumentation is equally a means for interaction among individuals, a mechanism with causal powers: not only does the rhetor place a commitment on the addressees to accept his views for which he advanced good reason; it is also through the agency of logic that the rhetor, at times, causes certain beliefs in the addressees (Ben, 2012).

Scholars (Bal, 2009; Bal and Saint-Dizier, 2009; van Dijk, 1996a) contend that persuasive texts in general, and editorials in particular, exhibit the following argumentation structure: opening statement, support statement which could be either facts or opinions, and conclusion. According to Bal (2009) the opening

statement introduces the issue in focus even as support statements seek to persuade the readers on the issue in consideration. The concluding part, Bal (2009) explains, expresses promise or provides some recommendations to the audience. As Bal (2009) observes, the conclusion often reiterates the opening statement though in a slightly rephrased form geared towards driving home the points previously made. Likewise, Stonecipher (1979) and MacDougall (1973) made similar observation about the structure of editorials. Stonecipher (1979), for example, likens an editorial to an essay comprising an introduction, body and conclusion. In his categorisation, MacDougall (1973) identifies the three-part structure in an editorial to include the subject or news peg, the reaction and the reason. Taken together, an editorial aims at persuading the addressees to accept its own point of view. In doing this, editorials make different kinds of argument using several persuasive strategies.

The 2015 electioneering period represents such time of uncertainty and tension given the spate of political violence and inflammatory statements deployed by several political actors. Nigerian newspapers through their editorials did not stand aloof during these turbulent times in the nation's history. Instead it argued, made a case for free and fair polls through the agency of their editorials. The purpose of this study is to examine how Nigerian newspapers argued for free and fair election during 2015 general election in Nigeria.

Rhetorical Analysis

As established in the previous section, editorials sometimes take on an argumentative posture with the sole aim of persuading the reader to accept its own position. Prinsloo (2009) notes that media text draws intertextually on other texts in order to convey its message. For this reason, Prinsloo (2009) advises that a media text needs to be studied in terms of the way it is crafted. According to her, "it needs to be analysed as a social act that mediates the substance of the text and is therefore also a rhetorical act" (Prinsloo, 2009: 211). Rhetoric basically relates to an effort at persuasion carried out by the writer or speaker via the choices made in the production of the text (Prinsloo, 2009). Aristotle in Richardson (2007: 156) defines rhetoric as "the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion". Seen as a political tool, rhetoric's goal is not only to achieve persuasion but to find the persuasive facts in each piece and present them convincingly so as to engender action. The rhetor or arguer takes into account existing social patterns of the period and place in the construction of the text.

As Richardson (2007) explains, the identification of rhetorical discourse used is a vital first stage when approaching rhetorical analysis. In rhetorical practice, there are three kinds of argument: forensic, epideictic and deliberative argument (Richardson, 2007). As Richardson (2007) observes, every kind of persuasive discourse has exact rhetorical objectives it wants to achieve and, as a result would adopt special topics in realising the stated objectives. Forensic rhetoric relates to the type of argumentative discourse where the arguer either denounces or defends someone's past deeds. Focused on the past, forensic rhetoric has as its modes of operation accusation and defence bordering on issues of justice and injustice committed by the defendant (Richardson, 2007). In epideictic rhetoric, the rhetor

is preoccupied with demonstrating that someone or something is worthy of admiration or condemnation. Concerned with the present, epideictic rhetoric either praises or censures while addressing issues such as honour and dishonour. Intricately tied to the character of those referred to, the arguer tries to make the audience esteem those referred to on account of their goodness or hate them due to their badness (Richardson, 2007). A positive rhetoric, Richardson (2007) explains can be categorised as a eulogy while a negative rhetoric is termed an invective. A deliberative rhetoric is employed when a rhetorer is discussing the desirability or otherwise of a decision, especially political decision (Richardson, 2007). With its means as inducement and dissuasion, deliberative rhetoric which deals with the future, has as its special topic the advantageous and disadvantageous nature of issue at hand (Richardson, 2007).

Central to rhetoric, Richardson (2007) notes, is the mode or strategy the arguer adopts in persuading the audience. Every argument presupposes the presence of what Prinsloo (2009: 244) referred to as “rhetorical triangle”. This consists of the argument (logos), the audience (pathos) and the arguer (ethos). The strategy for persuasion an arguer employs can be identified by the emphasis placed on any point of the triangle (Richardson, 2007). An ethotic argument is one which depends on the establishment of the credibility of the author or speaker (Leach, 2000). Here, it is believed that the audience will likely be convinced based on the character or ethos of the arguer. For instance, the audience is likely to be persuaded by the views of a medical doctor than a legal practitioner on any health matter. Through a pathotic argument, the arguer appeals to the emotions of the audience (Leach, 2000). Prinsloo (2009) explains that the arguer employs pathos in an argument in order to move the audience to pity, fear, remorse or rage where the audience will be open to his argument. A logetic argument, Prinsloo (2009) points out, is contingent upon the logic or evidence offered. Richardson (2007) notes that through the logic and structure of the argument an audience can be persuaded. A logetic argument can be made deductively and inductively (Prinsloo, 2009). According to her, “In a deductive argument an assertion is made by making a series of statements” (Prinsloo, 2009: 247). Conversely, an inductive argument uses a particular case to support a general conclusion (Richardson, 2007). There are three ways an inductive argument can be made: symptomatic, analogy or comparison and causal relationship argument (Richardson, 2007; Prinsloo, 2009). A symptomatic argument is one in which a particular instance is used to exemplify a bigger state of affairs. Prinsloo (2009: 247) observes that words like “characteristic”, “typical”, demonstrate this form of inductive argument. When argument by analogy or comparison is made, the arguer compares a specific case to something which the audience is conversant with or supports or strongly opposes (Richardson, 2007). Terms like “equally”, “similarly”, “so too”, “any more than”, “accordingly” are a common feature (Richardson 2007; Prinsloo, 2009). Causal relationship argument are marked by words that are suggestive of consequences like “creates”, “makes”, “gives rise to” feature prominently (Richardson, 2007: 164). Prinsloo (2009: 248) observes that in argument by causal relationship, “chronology is confused with cause and effect and other factors are consequently ignored”.

Discussion

In this section, the researcher seeks to analyse the rhetorical strategies employed in the editorial coverage of 2015 elections in Nigeria. As Prinsloo points out, the “particular choices made to construct a text draw on the various social patterns or social orders of their time and place” (2009:211). For this reason, she explains that when texts are analysed as a rhetorical act, the analyst is seeking to establish how the worlds of experience are fashioned for texts to effectively engage and interpret the worlds which they refer to (Prinsloo, 2009). In engaging the issues that were firmly entrenched in the rhetorical arguments used in the editorials, I will first interrogate the use of the word “we”. I will then show how argumentation was mobilised in the sampled editorials to appeal to three key issues: calls for violence-free polls, credible electoral process and rational voting. In modes of argumentation, “we” relates to ethotic mode of argumentation in which the character of the arguer enhances or diminishes the acceptability of its argument.

The Editorial “we”

The editorial is seen as an institutional opinion of a newspaper on any issue (MacDougall, 1973). This is why it is unaccompanied by any bye-line. As Hulteng (1973) explains, editorials are usually written with the word “we” which could represent the editorial board or the policy makers of the publication. This indicates that the editorial is not presented as the opinion of a particular person. The word “we” was severally used in some of the editorials chosen for this rhetorical analysis. In relation to the modes of argumentation, “we” relates to ethos which is personal character of the arguer. The credibility of a newspaper, to an extent, determines the level of impact its editorial makes in a given society. Below are some of the examples of the use of the word “we” in the editorials:

We however appeal to the officers in national interest to refrain from embarking on strike and toe the path of discipline and patriotism which is the hallmark of their calling and pursue their demands through official channels (*Independent*, March 9, 2015)

This list, **we** must say, is by no means exhaustive, but should serve as a take-off point, if the political class is serious. (*Leadership*, December 13, 2014)

Hulteng (1973) however points out that the use of the word “we” can bring about confusion to the editorial style. The use of the word, “we”, Hulteng (1973), posits can be used in an editorial to refer to the citizens of a country while it can also be used in the same piece to mean the paper. The extract below exemplifies this point:

We believe that INEC has a moral right as a regulatory commission to screen, sanitise, monitor and sanction the amorphous bodies that call themselves political parties...**We** will only be dignifying frivolous people by allowing under-aged voters and candidates to become a cog in the wheel of our democratic progress (*Leadership*, January 23, 2015).

Here, the first “we” refers to the paper while the second was actually made in reference to Nigerians. To avoid the confusion cited above, *Independent* newspaper uses the word “Newspaper” alongside the word “we” to refer to the newspaper. An example of this is shown below:

This Newspaper has severally called on the political class to stop heating up the polity in the face of the on-going political engineering ahead of the 2015 general elections. In line with that position, we find the statements credited to the Octogenarian (Clark) as unfortunate as it is quite provocative and capable of heating up the polity (*Independent*, December 12, 2014).

While some publications have stuck to using “we” to refer to the paper with its attendant confusion, others have adopted the use of the word, “Newspaper” to achieve greater clarity in their editorials. Interestingly, *The Guardian*, in particular, does not use any words to refer to itself. This is in keeping with its writing style. On this, *The Guardian* style guide counsels, “Keep yourself in the background. Readers are not interested in your personal history. Over-personalised or autobiographical journalism has no place in *The Guardian*” (Style: A Guide for Journalists, 1983:11). The import of projecting their ethotic value in these editorials through the use of the word “we” is put in proper perspective when the mission statements of these papers are analysed. For instance, *Guardian* newspaper positions herself as a medium whose duty to the state is not only to protect and defend the citizens, but also to create the necessary conditions, political, social, economic and cultural in which all citizens may realise their full potentials as human beings (*Guardian* 2016). Equally, *Vanguard* newspaper aspires to serve the people through a stated commitment to the ideals of free enterprise, the rule of law and good governance (*Vanguard* 2016). *Independent* newspaper claims that the paper shall be independent on all matters, but never neutral on any matter especially those pertaining to the well-being of the people of Nigeria. With these self-confessed mission statements aimed at serving the interest of the Nigerian people, these dailies have positioned themselves in the minds of the reader as standing with Nigeria and her people. This finds expression in Louis M. Lyons’, former curator of the Nieman Foundation (a foundation for journalism at Harvard) justification for an editorial page cited in Stonecipher (1979: 31) in which he averred that:

... if one needed an excuse for an editorial page, or to try to define the primary role of the page, I think it would be to express the tone of the paper. This is even more than the policy of the paper. It’s a chance to represent the institution itself, as a civilised and civilising force, as a concerned and considerate citizen, as a moderate and moderating influence, as a thoughtful person, a good neighbour, one who cares.

Thus, their views on any national matter should be read from the prism of patriotism and unflinching desire to preserve the nation’s democratic experience. Therefore, the mobilisation of “we” in these editorials is a persuasive strategy designed to make their argument believable.

Having discussed how editorial “we” was mobilised by editorial writers to further their argument, the next section discusses how the three kinds of argumentation (forensic, epideictic and deliberative arguments) and three modes of argumentation (pathotic, ethotic and logetic arguments) were deployed by editorial writers to persuade the audience towards achieving free and fair polls.

Call for violence-free polls

The 2015 electioneering period was marked by violence which necessitated calls for violence-free elections. In one of its

editorials “No to Pre-election violence” published on March 13, 2015, *The Guardian* made an epideictic argument in which it flays politicians over the worrying spate of violence in the lead-up to the election. In so doing, it used an inductive symptomatic argument to argue that the death of six persons at a political rally in Rivers State is reflective of what took place in other parts of the country.

The eruption of violence, with its trail of explosions, gunshots and intimidation that marred the All Progressives Congress (APC) gubernatorial campaign in Okrika, Rivers State, the other day, is a bitter reminder that elections are still a ‘do or die’ affair in many parts of the country... This is very regrettable given the assurance of a violence-free election promised by politicians during publicised peace pacts amongst parties (*The Guardian*, March 13, 2015)

Using logetic argument, the editorial wondered “what kind of elections and leaders are these warring politicians engendering?” It maintains that the problem could be solved if the law is allowed to take its course on those who foment trouble during election.

Addressing the problem of violence demands more than just advisory submissions to the deaf; it demands courageous deployment of the cudgel of the law. Both Section 227 of the Constitution and Section 81 of the Electoral Act 2010 (as amended) which prescribes punishments for contravention of Section 227 of the Constitution, are legal provisions addressing electoral violence (*The Guardian*, March 13, 2015).

In a similar editorial published in the *Vanguard* on March 16, 2015, headlined, “Thugs – Well, Alive”, the paper makes an epideictic argument by criticizing the ignoble role thugs play in exacerbating the spate of violence in the political arena. The editorial uses logetic mode of argumentation in contending that, “Thugs are in the business because violence is profitable”. While employing an inductive argument by causal relationship, the paper averred that:

Thugs are growing in numbers and in the intensity of their actions. They adorn an air of invincibility because society permits them, dreads them, and sometimes adores them (*Vanguard*, March 16, 2015).

Still on its use of logetic strategy of argumentation, the paper, applying an inductive argument by causal relationship, further contends that thugs have grown from the peripheral role they played during elections to a more central one because they have never been punished for their evil deeds instead, it appears they are rewarded.

From humble beginnings that saw thugs on the fringes of elections, they have assumed commanding positions in our politics. The growth and importance of thugs are sustained by willingness of most candidates to use them, protect them, and reward them (*Vanguard*, March 16, 2015).

The editorials not only addressed issues of violence but also condemned anything that could lead to violence during the electioneering period. An example of this is the editorial titled “E. K. Clark’s Outburst” published in *Independent* on December 12, 2014. It is equally an epideictic discourse as well as an invective rhetoric in that it censures Chief Edwin Clark for alleging that APC could poison President Jonathan in their quest to take over the reins of government. Employing ethotic mode of

argumentation that evidences consistent stance against inflammatory statement, the paper submitted that:

This Newspaper has severally called on the political class to stop heating up the polity in the face of the on-going political engineering ahead of the 2015 general elections. In line with that position, we find the statements credited to the Octogenarian (Clark) as unfortunate as it is quite provocative and capable of heating up the polity (*Independent*, December 12, 2014).

Invocation of its stance against provocative utterances places the paper above charges of being partisan or selective in its actions. Thus the paper assumes a disinterested arbiter whose views should be received within the lense of patriotism and fairness. The editorial equally used logetic mode of argumentation to show the inappropriateness of Chief Clark's assertion.

Clark needs to be reminded that Jonathan is not an Ijaw president, but that of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. We share the sentiment that Jonathan is his political godson and that should be the off-limit, as such unguarded utterances will do the nation no good...

All of these are, regrettably, statements that heat up the polity at a time Nigeria is saddled with her worst kind of insecurity as never seen before... we admonish Clark to be a father of the nation, irrespective of his political loyalty or ethnic nationality. At over 85 years of age, we expect no less from him, as the younger generation of Nigerians look unto him and other elder statesmen for their wealth of experience and wisdom. (*Independent*, December 12, 2014).

The admonition by this editorial to Chief Clark to be "a father of the nation" is a deployment of pathotic mode of argumentation designed to evoke the feeling of fatherhood which confers on him the values of restraint, tolerance and responsibility.

Call for Credible Electoral Process

A major theme that emerged from this study is that the newspapers, whose editorials were selected for this study, were unequivocal in their insistence on credible electoral process. Expectedly, they added their voices to a number of contentious issues that dominated the electioneering period, all aimed at engendering credible electoral process. One of them was the postponement of election. The editorial, "Don't Mess With February 14 Date" published in the *Leadership* newspaper on January 26, 2015, advances a deliberative argument by emphasizing the undesirability of election postponement. The editorial likened the call for election to be postponed to "Coteries of voices ...converging, once more, on a road to damnation". The paper while using logetic mode of argumentation contended that:

INEC has had four years to prepare for this year's polls. A storm foretold cannot take the cripple by surprise. The National Assembly has had four years to put in place enabling legislations that could have removed all hurdles to free, fair, transparent and credible elections. The executive and judiciary arms have had four years to do what is right.

The nation faces a far greater danger in postponing the polls than in trying to right all wrongs before calling for polls. Shifting of the polls is bound to put the democratic structure in serious threat (*Leadership*, January 26, 2015).

Hence the call for election postponement was misplaced. Through an inductive argument by analogy, the editorial reminded "Nigerians that the current hysteria is a throwback to 1993" in which similar calls for polls shift were made that year. The comparison of the call for election postponement to the annulment of June 12, 1993 elections was designed to evoke all the negativities that are the legacy of that botched poll. It thus argued:

Now, they have come again – those who thrive only in crisis but would not hesitate to migrate to safer climes after waging war on their nation. After nearly 23 years, they are pushing the country, once again, to the precipice. Unnecessarily. Wickedly (*Leadership*, January 26, 2015).

Any Nigerian or someone conversant with Nigerian politics knows that the June 12, 1993 crisis was one of Nigeria's darkest moments in her political history which no-one wants a repeat. Therefore, comparing election postponement to drive the nation to a repeat of June 12 saga was a powerful way of persuading political actors against it.

Also, *Independent* published an editorial on January 30, 2015 with the headline, "Why elections must hold" in which it highlighted the undesirability of election postponement. Advancing its position through deliberative rhetoric, the editorial used a logetic mode of argumentation to counter the claim by the National Security Adviser to the President, Col. Sambo Dasuki, that 30 million Nigerians were yet to collect their PVCs.

The figure is however questionable as groups like the Conference of Nigerian Political Parties (CNPP), a coalition of opposition parties have faulted the claim, arguing that over 60% PVCs have been collected nationwide by anxious Nigerians. Figures from the electoral commission indicate that 42.7 million PVCs have been distributed (*Independent*, January 30, 2015).

From the above, the editorial punctured the claim by Col. Sambo Dasuki that 30 million Nigerians had not received their PVC by citing two authorities – CNPP and INEC – who gave a contrary assessment of the level of PVC distribution. Drawing from inductive argument by comparison, the editorial noted, "Available records had showed that out of the 73,528, 040 registered Nigerian voters in 2011, only 21, 074, 621 representing just about 28.66% actually cast their votes." Hence the claim that the election should be shifted on account of incomplete distribution of PVC cannot stand, as it has been evidenced by history that not all who collect their PVC will eventually vote. The paper also employed pathotic mode of argumentation when it averred that, "INEC must know that the fate of 170 million Nigerians is in its hands. Prof. Attahiru Jega must be on top of his game by discharging the responsibilities reposed on him creditably." The use of pathotic mode of argumentation, it could be argued, was designed to appeal to the emotions of INEC chair and entire staff to come to terms with the fact that the future of Nigeria depended on the conduct of the election.

An *Independent* editorial, "The looming Police strike" published on March 9, 2015 used a deliberative argument to argue against the proposed strike. Employing logetic mode of argumentation, the paper built its argument on two premises: one, that the date for the strike was ill-timed, "it is ominous why the Police officers chose that date which is potentially ruinous to the deferred election"; two, that the law does not permit police

officers to go on strike, “Obviously, the Police Act forbids officers and men of the Nigerian Police Force from unionizing and going on strike considering the essential nature of their job.” A pathetic mode of argumentation was also used to appeal to the officers.

We however appeal to the officers in national interest to refrain from embarking on strike and toe the path of discipline and patriotism which is the hallmark of their calling and pursue their demands through official channels (*Independent*, March 9, 2015)

The editorial, “Disqualify Under-Aged Candidates Before Polls” which appeared in *Leadership* newspaper on January 23, 2015 is a deliberative argument. The paper contends that allowing under-aged candidates to stand for election could “leave room for politicians to latch on to technicalities to wrest from people a mandate that was freely given by the electorate.” Applying deductive argument, the editorial cited legal provisions which spelled out age requirements of candidates, as well as the possible circumstances (typographical errors) that could have led to the emergence of those under-aged candidates. The editorial insisted that:

INEC’s role in this democracy is not that of a rubber stamp agency for frivolous politicians and parties. It should weed out unserious candidates and parties. We believe that INEC has the moral right as a regulatory commission to screen, sanitise, monitor and sanction the amorphous bodies that call themselves political parties (*Leadership*, January 23, 2015).

The editorial made use of pathetic mode of argumentation by asserting that “INEC has a moral right as a regulatory commission to screen, sanitise, monitor and sanction the amorphous bodies...” This is an appeal to INEC’s sense of judgment geared towards getting INEC to act morally on the under-aged candidates, even when they have no legal powers to do so.

Call for Rational Voting

Newspaper editorials selected for this study made a strong case for rational voting. It firmly believes that the electorate can only make significant impact in an electoral process if they vote with appreciable degree of understanding of the implications of their decisions. This is particularly true for a young democracy like Nigeria where people’s voting decisions are usually not based on the overall good of the country but on ethnic, parochial and selfish gains. Thus, the editorials made concerted efforts at encouraging the electorate to vote based on full information about the candidates and their views on issues affecting Nigeria. These editorials also reminded the electorate that current difficulties Nigerians are experiencing are a consequence of voting for unprepared leaders. This editorial, “Now that Candidates have Emerged” published in *Leadership* newspaper on December 13, 2014 was written to make a case for rational voting. It is the opinion of the editorial that the electorate cannot vote wisely without the knowledge of where the candidates stand on key issues confronting the nation. For this reason, the paper highlights some issues candidates must address. Making a logetic argument, the paper posited that the need for the electorate to vote rationally was due to the sorry state of the economy. To say that the nation’s economy is indescribably directionless would be being charitable, because, in our opinion, not much is

going on to give the people hope of a better tomorrow. With inflation on the gallop, existence for many Nigerians has become drudgery. Unemployment that politicians talk about glibly must be made the centre of national political discourse and measures designed to bring the scourge within acceptable limits through programmes that are statistically measurable clearly defined (*Leadership*, December 13, 2014).

It also employed forensic rhetoric to explain why the private sector has not been able to generate jobs as expected.

Ordinarily, one would have expected the private sector to be the engine room of efforts to generate jobs, but the nation’s experience in the last four years is such that with all the incentives put in place not much has been achieved, simply because the private operators see such policies as avenues to recoup investments in the political arena (*Leadership*, December 13, 2014).

For this reason, the editorial insisted that “Henceforth, Nigerians must say no to such fraudulent disposition.”

A *Vanguard* editorial on March 26, 2015 titled, “For Votes to Count”, using a deliberative rhetoric, argued in favour of Nigerians voting with high degree of thoughtfulness. While making a forensic argument, it warned that “if Nigerians do not approach the elections with circumspection, 2015 would produce the same unsatisfying outcome we have had since 1999.” Applying a logetic mode of argumentation, the editorial counselled that:

It is important too that those who we are electing would lead Nigeria out of economic gloom. Candidates we are electing should have clear milestones for assessing how they would redirect Nigeria from further drifting (*Vanguard*, March 26, 2015).

While making an inductive argument by causal relationship, the paper submitted that:

Nigerians’ dissatisfaction with our current political system stems from two points, the near total neglect of the welfare of the people and the aversion of public office holders to accountability (*Vanguard*, March 26, 2015).

A similar editorial, “Nigerians, Their Future” was also published in the *Vanguard* on February 16, 2015. In the editorial, the paper argued for the election of leaders who will retrieve the nation from its current sorry state. The paper made an inductive argument by causal relationship when it claimed that incompetent leadership has resulted in the scandalous performance of government.

The scandalous performance of governments, with very rare exceptions, should be one of the issues to be judged as Nigerians vote for their future that exceptional incompetence has suspended in the past 16 years.

Nigerians have endured unnecessary hardship since 1999 because state governments with the connivance of the powers in Abuja elected backwardness, and at best a blurred future, for the country. Ravaging poverty has reduced the people to helplessness never seen in the past (*Vanguard*, February 16, 2015).

The editorial equally employed forensic argument in denouncing past performance of politicians in governance.

Either through surrogates, who are promising a freshness alien to them, or directly by themselves, they want to consign the

future of Nigerians to the inattentive treatment it receive since 1999.

All those who have abused their offices, neglected the people, created communal conflicts to feather their interests, must be denied the chance to continue the waste of our people and their opportunities.

The search is on for leaders who will retrieve Nigeria from the precipice many of those in power condemned it to since 1999 (*Vanguard*, February 16, 2015).

Using a logetic mode of argumentation, the editorial cited how some candidates emerged as party flag-bearers as a foretaste of what some politicians have in stock for the populace.

The overbearing conduct of our leaders saw many of them breaching laws to have their ways in appointing their successor, and foisting on us future parliamentarians who belong to the same retrogressive past (*Vanguard*, February 16, 2015).

In this section, the study examined the kinds of argument and modes of argumentation used by editorial writers to make these editorials persuasive.

Conclusion

This study sought to examine how four Nigerian newspapers, through their editorials, argued for free and fair 2015 elections in Nigeria. Editorials are identified as very critical during tense periods such as elections because the audience rely on their reasoned opinions to make informed decisions. As a responsible citizen, newspapers using their editorials argued for what it considered to be in the best interest of the society. In the performance of this duty, Nigerian editorials employed argumentation to make three kinds of calls during the 2015 poll namely: calls for violence-free polls, call for credible electoral process and call for rational voting. These arguments represented three important aspects of the nation's electoral system which makes addressing them not only important but central to achieving free and fair polls. In doing this, the editorials employed pathos, logetic and ethos modes of argumentation. On ethos mode of argumentation, the practice of non-endorsement of any political party, at least publicly, puts these newspapers in good stead serve as disinterested umpire whose views will not be read as having partisan undertone. The papers tried to enhance the credibility of their argument by emphasizing the consistency of their stance as well as their even-handedness in dealing with different political actors. Logetically, most of the arguments advanced in these editorials were premised on the provisions of the law as evidence to support whatever view they hold. By doing this, the editorials sought to convince the reader to accept their point of view based on the evidence adduced. For instance, in making a case that the electorate vote rationally, a *Vanguard* editorial pointed out that the scandalous performance of Nigeria's political leaders was a consequence of ethnically-based voting pattern. With respect to pathos, these editorials appealed to the emotions of the addressees (Prof. Attahiru Jega, INEC staff, E.K Clark, members of the Nigeria police force etc.) to engender acceptance of the views. A case in point is the appeal to officers and men of the Nigeria Police Force against their planned industrial action during the polls in which *The Independent* urged them to reconsider their decision in national interest. Similar appeal was made to INEC by *The Independent* in which they were told that the fate of the nation depended on

them. These editorials used forensic, epideictic and deliberative kinds of argumentation in arguing diverse positions. For instance, editorials advocating for rational voting made use of deliberative kind of argumentation as it warned that the nation would still face the problem of poor governance if the electorate voted without a measure of wakefulness or thoughtfulness. There was a preponderance of deliberative argument because the editorials were written preparatory to the polls. Hence the editorials argued against the undesirability of certain aspects of the electoral process in the hope of changing the views of the electorates, government or electoral umpire with respect to the elections. These arguments were made with the sole purpose of persuading the addressees to accept particular kind of arguments. Taken together, these editorials made these arguments in the hope of achieving credible, free and fair polls.

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