

PRESS FRAMING OF ANTI-CORRUPTION WAR ON BUHARI'S FIRST YEAR ANNIVERSARY

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ABSTRACT

Media framing which is at the heart of political communication is concerned with the manner that a particular news item or story is produced. This study analyses how five Nigerian newspapers framed the fight against corruption embarked upon by the Buhari administration one year after his assumption of office. Using newspaper editorials published on Nigeria's Democracy Day (May 29, 2016), as unit of analysis, it draws on the methodological context of equivalent framing to demonstrate how the selected newspapers have framed the war against corruption which was the major thrust of the 'Change' campaign message articulated by Buhari as a Presidential aspirant and his political party (All Progressives' Congress), during the build-up to the 2015 general elections in Nigeria. Findings suggest that the Press position on national issues, like the anti-corruption war, is subject to ethnic influence and political ownership as revealed by the 'uncompromising frame' and the 'witch-hunting frame.'

Keywords: Media, Anti-corruption war, Buhari's first year anniversary, 2015 Nigerian presidential election, Framing.

INTRODUCTION

If we do not kill corruption in this country, corruption will kill Nigerians' - (Muhammadu Buhari, All Progressives Congress Presidential Candidate, at the South-South Zonal Election Campaign Rally held in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, March 2015).

On May 29, 2015, millions of Nigerians watched President Muhammadu Buhari as he took oath of office, delivering his first inaugural speech as President where he made the oft-cited statement of "I belong to everybody and I belong to nobody" (Premium Times, 2015). An historic event in itself, it would be the first time an opposition party – All Progressives Congress (APC) will break the stronghold of a ruling party in the national politics of Nigeria since democracy was restored in 1999 in the country after a prolonged military rule. For sixteen years, the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) had won elections at the Centre and most of the states up till 2015 when the opposition

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party, All Progressives Congress (APC), defeated it with Muhammadu Buhari emerging the President-elect.

The cornerstone of Buhari's success was his reputation during his military rule (1983-1985) as an incorruptible Head of State. His campaign strategy of waging war against corruption received positive hearing of the populace (Abubakre and Oyewo, 2015; Ekpo, Chime and Enor, 2016). Corruption has been a scourge that had deterred the progress of Nigeria and portrayed Nigerians in negative light among the comity of nations. The anti-corruption war thus became a major component or rallying theme of the 'change' campaign message advanced by the APC to persuade Nigerians to vote for the political party in the 2015 Nigerian Presidential election. The Buhari military government (1983-1985) had mobilized the media and the populace in its War Against Indiscipline (WAI). This was however coupled with the introduction of stern decrees which undermined the freedom of the press and individuals, (Oso, Odunlami and Adaja, 2011), in the regime's bid to tackle socio-economic challenges confronting the nation at that period.

Bearing in mind that democracy cannot be deepened without the significant impact of the media on the political process, this study therefore, seeks to probe how the Nigerian press has framed the war on corruption on Buhari's first year anniversary. According to the Nigerian Constitution (1999) the tenure of a Nigerian president is for four years. The first year of a president's term tenure therefore effectively marks 25 percent of his administration. Buhari's first year anniversary was on Sunday May 29, 2016. In a political economy where media ownership in the country is anchored more on political motives rather than on profit (Chukwu, 2015; Abubakre and Oyewo, 2015), the research attempts to explore how the Nigerian press has framed the fight against corruption on Buhari's first year anniversary in office. By understanding the role played by the Nigerian Press in the framing of combating corruption, this study seeks to contribute to the communication discipline by providing a proper understanding of the relationship which exists between the Nigerian media and the authorities and how the former has mirrored the latter in the eyes of the citizenry.

This study will be guided by the framing theory which is at the heart of political communication and is concerned with the manner that a particular news item or story is produced. Media framing as been identified as a particularly useful methodological approach towards understanding the media landscape given its unique political and socio-cultural setting. The researcher adopts an equivalent framing approach to examine the framing of anti-corruption by the Press. The equivalent framing approach according to Cacciatore, Scheufele and Iyengar (2016), originates from psychology-rooted framing which 'relies upon different but logically equivalent words or phrases to produce framing effect.'

Corruption, as Ogbondah (2011:25) notes, is an 'endemic illness among members of Nigeria's ruling aristocracy and it has become the fulcrum on which the Nigeria state revolves.' Between 1999 and 2002, Transparency International (TI) had consistently ranked Nigeria as the second most corrupt country in the world while in its 2016 Corruption Perception Index report, a year into Buhari's administration; it ranked Nigeria as the 136 least corrupt nation out of 176 countries (Transparency International website). The Cable News Network (CNN) also comments that, "Nigerians are worn down by inherent corruption" just as it observed that the country remains deeply "divided between north and south along religious lines" (Deferios, 2012) as cited in Obadare and Adebani (2013:3).

This division is also manifested in the ownership of Nigeria's Press. While Lawson (2009:73) notes that anti-corruption campaigns in Africa 'aims to mollify donors while using corruption charges instrumentally to undermine rivals and shore up personal loyalty to the president', Adebaniwa and Obadare (2011:185) submits that, the gravest threats to anti-corruption campaigns stem from "a combination of intra-elite rancour and political intrigues" adding that, "where anti-corruption efforts are not backed by other radical institutional reforms, they fall prey to the overall endemic (systemic) crisis, a part of which, abinitio, necessitated the anti-corruption war." Onwumah (2013) on his part, advocates the mainstreaming of culture centred on the beliefs and values of the people into Nigeria's anti-corruption campaign because legal and judicial systems employed in fighting corruption has proved ineffective.

CORRUPTION WITHIN THE NIGERIAN MEDIA: A HISTORICAL BACKDROP

While some scholars (Onwumah, 2013; Ekpo, Chime and Enor, 2016) have linked the history of corruption in Nigeria to the vestiges of colonialism marked by the top-down exploitative relationship which exists between British imperialists and Nigerian workers at that time, others (Adegbulu, 2010; Liman, 2017) contended that, it was under former military President, Ibrahim Babangida who, through a coup, overthrew the Buhari military government in 1985 and subsequently freed corrupt politicians jailed by the latter, that laid the foundation for the entrenchment and institutionalization of corruption within the Nigerian polity.

Aside from championing the course of freedom towards gaining independence from the British colonial rule, corruption was another issue on which Nigerian nationalists were united, particularly those from the Southern geopolitical zone of the country. Two nationalists who stand out in this regard were: Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe (then Premier of the Eastern Region) and Chief Olusegun Awolowo (foundation Premier of the Western Region) who had been indicted for acts of corruption between 1956 and 1962 respectively. These two nationalists in particular, had also contributed significantly to the history and the development of the Nigerian mass media. While the Justice Strafford Forster Sutton-led Panel of Inquiry indicted Azikiwe for diverting resources of the then Eastern region to the African Continental Bank (ACB) where he had substantial interests and was a principal shareholder, the Justice G.B. Coker Commission of Enquiry indicted Awolowo for diverting funds from the Western Region Marketing Board into the coffers of his political party, Action Group (Nwankwo, 2000).

The Nigerian Tribune newspaper founded by Awolowo was used to project the Action Group (AG) of the Western region under the leadership of Awolowo while the West African Pilot established by Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe, who is from the Eastern region, was the media outlet of the National Council of Nigerian and Cameroun (NCNC) later renamed National Council of Nigerian Citizens. Oso, Odunlami and Adaja (2011: 8-9) corroborates the submission of Nwankwo (2000), when they wrote that both the "NCNC and AG kept their newspapers afloat through the remarkable support of the commercial banks (Africa Continental Bank (ACB) and National Bank) and other companies associated with their respective governments." The bottom-line from the foregoing is that, the Nigerian nationalists in the course of occupying political office also used their positions to further not only political interests, but also unarguably, their own personal benefits.

THE BUHARI PERSONA, MEDIA AND THE BUILD-UP TO THE 2015 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

An enduring legacy of the Buhari military era (1983-1985), was the introduction of the War Against Indiscipline (WAI) which sought to inculcate public order and discipline, enthrone civic responsibility and curb unruliness among Nigerians, which began with citizens adhering to proper queuing at bus stops and supermarkets under the watchful eyes of soldiers with horsewhips. As Head of State, Buhari went after corrupt politicians who were jailed for a minimum of 100 years in prison after being tried by tribunals. Ogbondah (2011:27) however notes that, it was the trial and imprisonment of two journalists of *The Guardian* newspapers (Tunde Thompson and Nduka Irabor) which marked a critical turning point in the state-press relations during the Buhari regime.

Thus, flowing from this, the narrative from media outlets sympathetic to the former ruling party (PDP) and its presidential candidate, ex-President Goodluck Jonathan (who then was seeking re-election) during the 2015 general elections, was to portray Buhari as an autocrat, by emphasizing his military dictatorship past. Ekanem and Sobowale (2017:39) notes however, that Jonathan failed to fulfil the pledge of zero tolerance to corruption which he made before his assumption of office as Nigeria's President in 2011, pointing out that, instead, "public officials emphasized the mundane aspect of corruption as a strategy to distract citizens' attention from the real issue of corruption eradication. The citizen's hope that the government would prosecute suspected corrupt officials, as reported by the media, was short-lived." Reviewing ex-president Goodluck Jonathan's administration a week before the 2015 presidential election was due to take place, Festus Eriye, an editor of *The Nation* had argued that:

If Jonathan's positives are not resonating, it is because his negatives are so overwhelming. Every regime has its fair share of scandals but this one seems to have a manufacturing plant that spews out sleaze. Over the last four years, it has staggered from tales of billions of dollars missing from the NNPC to flamboyant ministers blowing millions on armoured limousines to bungled arms purchase runs leading to embarrassing seizure of millions of dollars traced to the government in far away South Africa. (Eriye, 2015)

As a result, in the build-up to the 2015 presidential election, many Nigerians, in spite of and even because of Buhari's undemocratic credentials view him as having the wherewithal to tackle the pervasive corruption bedeviling the country (Abubakre, 2015). Hence, over the last two years, since Buhari's assumption of office as a democratically elected President on May 29, 2015, the Nigerian public sphere has been inundated with different expositions on political corruption allegedly perpetuated by elites particularly under the Jonathan administration, coined under broad media rubrics like 'Dasukigate', 'Diezanigate', 'Ikoyigate', 'Mainagate' among others.

NIGERIAN MEDIA AND THE FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION

One of the critical functions of journalism is holding elected political office holders accountable and the Nigerian mass media is no exception to this role. Through the media provided by journalists, a coalition of what people are saying about the performance or non-performance of political office holders is made. In essence, the media has the potential to curb corruption and participate in enthroning good governance in a free, democratic society. Camaj (2012) also offers that, the media can

support the judicial process by helping prosecutorial institutions in the investigation and exposition of corruption cases.

The anti-corruption war is a war that is used to confront individuals or group of people who are accused of looting the nation's commonwealth in the course of occupying political office for their own personal benefit or for those to whom they owe allegiance. While the major agencies which have been used mainly to wage the warfare against corruption are, the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) established in 2000 and 2003 respectively under former President, Olusegun Obasanjo, who had also pledged to fight corruption, President Buhari, after his assumption of office in 2015, instituted an intellectual arm in the fight against corruption which is, the Presidential Advisory Committee Against Corruption (PACAC) which had a Professor of Law, Itse Sagay, as its Chairman.

With the Nigerian news media after the 2015 general becoming increasingly critical of the Buhari administration's fight against corruption, government officials have also recently began to accuse the media of campaign discrimination and mocking of the Buhari administration's war against graft. At the 68th General Assembly of the Broadcasting Organisation of Nigeria (BON) which held in November 2017, the Minister of Information, Lai Mohammed, argued that the media cannot afford to sit on the fence as far as the fight against corruption is concerned. In his speech, Mohammed stated:

We are not saying the media should not criticize us over our strategy for the fight, but they should stop mocking us. In recent times, it is not unusual to read such headlines as 'Buhari's Government Losing Anti-Corruption War', 'Buhari's Anti-Corruption War is Failing', 'Arewa Youths Knock President Buhari Over Failing Anti-Corruption War'. This is sheer mockery, not reporting! (Okakwu, 2017)

This study knows that the fight against corruption has led to the introduction and implementation of new policies by the Buhari government, such as the Whistle Blowing policy, the Treasury Single Account (TSA) and threw up a host of new terminologies in social discourse like 'media trial', 'cabal', 'padding', 'budget padding', 'anti-corruption scam' amongst others. This study notes other drawbacks to the fight against corruption such as the President's state of health, agitation for devolution of powers or clamour for restructuring of Nigeria, economic recession due to corruption essentially as well as the fluctuation in oil market prices globally and other sundry matters which were calculated to put wool on the eyes of the people in the fight against corruption.

Hence, the role and perspectives of media practitioners and journalists in this wise cannot be disregarded, because they have their opinions and beliefs which is a product of their experiences as well as their interactions with political elites which manifests on the news content they produce for the public (Tuchman, 1978; Shoemaker and Reese, 2014). The activities of politicians (both from the ruling APC and the main opposition party-PDP), each of which try to use the media to generate public sentiments in its favour, can also not be ignored. Nonetheless, Ronning (2009:157) had argued that, "much of the pressure and talk of instituting anti-corruption programmes actually plays into the hands of those who belong to the corrupt elite, who manage to delude the development system into believing that they are mending their ways."

Critics of Buhari's campaign against graft have nonetheless argued that, practices which existed under the administration of his immediate predecessor, Goodluck Jonathan, have continued despite Buhari's anti-corruption rhetoric. The argument is that, in corruption cases where Buhari's associates appeared to have been indicted, such as that involving Babachir Lawal a former Secretary General to the Federation who was implicated in the grass-cutting scandal, Buhari appeared to have lost his bark against corruption as well as his bite in failing to secure convictions following the prosecution of high profile corrupt political office-holders. Even among members of the current ruling political class, the Nigerian president has been accused of double standards in the fight against corruption which has seen leading members of the main opposition party (PDP), decamping to the ruling All Progressives' Congress political party. As Shehu Sani, a Senator representing Kaduna Central in the upper legislative chamber of the National Assembly, puts it: "when it comes to fighting corruption in the National Assembly and the Judiciary and in larger Nigerian sectors, the President uses insecticide, but when it comes to fighting corruption within the presidency, they use deodorants" (Baiyewu, 2017).

METHODOLOGY

This study employed five national, wide-circulating newspapers –The Nation, The Punch, The Guardian, Daily Sun and the Daily Trust. While it is imperative to mention here that the Southwest geopolitical zone (Lagos-Ibadan axis) enjoys a high concentration of media organisations by virtue of the economic status of Lagos as a major commercial centre and Nigeria's former capital, it must be stated that, newspaper ownership in Nigeria is domiciled mostly in the Christian South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria while President Buhari is from the Muslim dominant northern geopolitical zone. Ciboh (2007) observed that the history of the Nigerian media, (in particular, print media) is interwoven with the history of the Christian religion. Nigeria's first newspaper, *Iwe Iroyin fun Awon Ara Egba ati Yoruba* (Newspaper for the Egbas and Yorubas), was established by a British missionary, Reverend Henry Townsend from Exeter, in November 1859 to propagate evangelism although it later delved into political issues of that time.

Ownership can also be traced to ethnic regionalism as seen during the colonial era wherein, Nigerian nationalists used the press to champion Nigeria's independence as well as partisan politics in which nationalists were deeply involved in the post-independence period in a bid to sway public opinion. In fact, Daramola (2015:147) observes that, media practitioners were themselves, political actors, noting that, the first set of politicians that established political parties were newspapermen. Thus, for this study, there is: The Nation and The Punch for the South-West zone; The Guardian for the South-South zone; Daily Sun for the South-East zone and the Daily Trust for the northern zone. Presidential election results obtained in the aftermath of the 2015 presidential election showed that the voting pattern in the South-West seemed to be more balanced than other regions, though, heavily in favour of Muhammadu Buhari because of the "anti-corruption toga" than the North that was sweeping for Buhari and the South-East/South-South sweeping for ex-President Goodluck Jonathan. The South-East/South-South voted enmasse for Goodluck Jonathan probably as a payback as an ethnic group that benefited most from the Jonathan administration (Abubakre, 2015).

All five newspapers have online editions which can be accessed easily in any part of the world. The research period was the newspaper editions published on Sunday May 29, 2016, which is designated as Democracy Day in Nigeria. The unit of analysis is the newspaper editorials published by each of the five newspapers ($n = 5$). The selected sample were analysed textually to examine the pattern of framing employed by each newspaper editorial as it concerns the anti-corruption war by the Buhari administration one year after his assumption of office as Nigerian President.

Newspaper editorials are the opinions expressed by newspapers owners and or editors of the medium. It is the position of the newspaper on contemporary political issues to inform their readers about what they think on such matters. It is usually written to persuade. Ekeanyanwu and Jokodola(2009:74) also asserts that editorials "provokes debate and offer enlightened judgments to readers. These ideas are presented as opinion. Editorials appear on the newspaper's editorial page, a page which includes editorials, columns, opinion articles, reviews and cartoons. If the paper contains more than one opinion page, the others are called op-ed pages." Given the abundance of literatures available on other newspaper texts, such as news and features, editorials appeared to have been neglected in media discourse research. Elyazale (2014:21) supports this assertion when he contended that newspaper editorials "deserve more consideration in media discourse research" given their characteristics, in terms of their structure and rhetorical nature, in terms of the language used in them. Izadi and Saghaye-Biria (2007:141) noted that, "unlike news discourse, editorials are conversations among a society's economic and power elites, with the public being less of an addressee than spectators." Ani and Anyandike (2013) define an editorial as a newspaper's "opinion on important social, political, economic or legal issue of the day, which is intended to persuade readers to agree to a particular point of view". Accordingly, they opined that editorial dwells on controversial issues to draw attention of the public to certain issues, draw up responses and attract new readership in a competitive newspaper market.

SELECTED NEWSPAPERS

The Nation

The Nation newspaper is believed to be owned by Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu. Tinubu was a foremost leader of the opposition in Nigeria and national leader of the All Progressives Congress (APC) before his party won the 2015 landmark Presidential election, thus effectively becoming the current ruling party in Nigeria. The newspaper stated mission is "to provide the general public with information they need to be free and self-governing in a democratic society; to vigorously champion a return to fundamental principles of federalism, believing that it is the arrangement that can best advance the multifarious interests of citizens in a country of many nations and faiths such as Nigeria" and to "serve as an independent monitor of power and hold those entrusted with its exercise accountable." According to the information on its website, www.thenationonline.net, which was launched on Monday July 31, 2006, The Nation is a "quality, national, newspaper with credible and dependable information. Not beholden to any interest group. Loyalty is to the nation." It won Newspaper of the Year in 2014 at the Diamond Awards for Media Excellence (DAME).

The Punch

The Punch newspaper, founded in 1971, is one of Nigeria's most influential daily with the current print-run put at about 80,000 copies per day. With its modern printing press, the colourful aesthetics of the newspaper makes it widely appealing to potential readers. It won the Newspaper of the Year in the 2015, 2016 and 2017 editions of the Diamond Awards for Media Excellence (DAME). Both The Nation and The Punch are widely popular among the seven Yoruba speaking states of the Southern region of Nigeria.

The Guardian

The Guardian was established in 1983 by the late Chief Alex Ibru, a businessman from Delta State, South-South Nigeria, who later served as a Minister under the military regime of late dictator, General Sani Abacha. The Guardian has been described as an elitist newspaper because at inception, it pioneered the concept of having an Editorial Board which was made up of diverse professionals, including senior journalists, captains of industry, retired civil servants and ambassadors, governors and generals, who debate issues and try to reach consensus on matters of governance that affects the country and this guides the editorial policy of the newspaper. The Guardian newspaper has been used to champion the cause of the Niger Delta South-South region, drawing attention to the challenges of confronting the region in terms of marginalization, oil spills damaging the environment and the activities of multi-national companies operating in the oil-rich region without commensurate corporate social responsibility and governmental attention. The Chairman of its Editorial Board, Rueben Abati, was also a presidential spokesman of ex-President Goodluck Jonathan who is from that region and during the 2015 general elections, the newspaper lent support to the re-election bid of Jonathan.

Daily Sun

The Daily Sun, a popular tabloid, was founded by Chief Orji Uzor Kalu, a politician and businessman from Abia State, South East Nigeria. Kalu was a chieftain of the former ruling party Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) during the 2015 general elections. It was incorporated in 2001 but started production in 2003. As at 2011, it had a daily print-run of 130,000 copies and 135,000 copies for its weekend titles.

Daily Trust

Established by the Media Trust Limited in 1998, the Daily Trust which is highly influential in the Northern geopolitical zone was launched in 2001. It is the newspaper with the largest circulation in northern Nigeria. Its Mission Statement and Vision respectively, reads: "To disseminate credible information for the good of all stakeholders" and "A world class media company that earns public trust."

FINDINGS

Table 1: Newspapers, Editorial Headline, Word count and page number

Newspapers May 29, 2016	Editorial Headline	Word count	Page Number
The Nation	Good and hopeful Buhari's first year started very slowly, but it is time to pick up momentum	961	15
The Punch	Buhari: Still waiting for the real change	1,247	16
The Guardian	Hope and Impediments: Buhari's First Year	1,906	12
Daily Sun	Buhari: 365 days after...	1,266	Cover page, 13
Daily Trust	One Year of Buhari	938	6

Equivalent framing of the anti-corruption war by the Buhari administration Uncompromising frame

In all the sampled newspapers, the tone of the anti-corruption war framing generally signifies support for the Buhari administration on his first year in office. On Sunday 29, May 2016, while all the five newspapers acknowledged that Buhari has given a free rein to the various anti-corruption agencies to do their job, the Daily Trust newspaper looked at it from a personal attributional perspective, as its editorial reads that:

Buhari's personal reputation for incorruptibility and his total aversion to corrupt deeds has been cemented nationally and internationally with revelations his regime made of the sordid corruption under his predecessors.

The Nation also noted that Buhari has imbued the war on corruption with the much-needed draft of public credibility, adding that, he has successfully elevated the moral tone of governance; the Daily Sun stated Buhari has demonstrated strong political will to tackle corruption. While the Punch referred to the anti-corruption body-Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) as 'hitherto lethargic', the Daily Sun noted that Buhari's 'body language' has emboldened the EFCC to ramp up its drive to recover stolen funds. The Guardian also noted that the 'disposition' of the President to take the anti-corruption fight seriously 'is not in doubt.' This frame has originated from Buhari himself, who has consistently stated that he was not prepared to spare any suspect implicated in the 2.1 billion dollars public funds allegedly withdrawn from the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) and the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), which was meant to buy arms to prosecute the Boko Harm insurgency in the North-East of Nigeria under the Jonathan government, a probe which began shortly after Buhari's assumption of office.

Witch-hunting frame

While the Guardian editorial on its part, suggested that Buhari's anti-corruption drive appear to be biased, the Daily Sun identified failure to get a conviction for individuals arraigned for corruption as raising "questions about the president's anti-corruption campaign." Evaluating the fight against corruption, The Punch also noted that, "there are concerns that the anti-graft war, so far, is a battle against a few" while

enjoining the President to keep partisanship in check in the war against graft. This was frame was borne out of the perception that the anti-corruption drive is against political opponents of the Buhari administration. Furthermore, the anti-corruption war could be seen from the perspective of the wave of defections of prominent politicians from the PDP to the APC possibly to obtain judicial salvation from being prosecuted for corruption. The witch-hunting frame was however absent in both the Daily Trust and The Nation newspapers. Thus, this study finds that the southern newspapers were more critical of Buhari's fight against corruption than the northern newspaper except for The Nation newspaper, whose support could be attributed to its ownership and political party through acts of omission. Newspapers from the Southern part of Nigeria appear to have an edge over the Northern region in terms of ownership as a result of the location of Lagos as a former administrative capital of Nigeria and economic nerve of the country; hence, they tend to dominate the shaping of governmental policies ahead of the media from the north.

CONCLUSION

This article has addressed the framing of the fight against corruption of the Buhari government's first year anniversary in the editorials of five national daily newspapers. It shows that the Nigerian Press are highly partisan when it comes to the fight against corruption as it reveals that their position on national issues such as the fight against corruption, are subject to ethnic influence and political ownership as evident from the omission of the witch-hunting frame in the Daily Trust newspaper and The Nation newspaper which owes allegiance to the national leader of the ruling All Progressives Congress political party.

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