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## **Reporting Politics of Defections in Nigeria: A Study of Uyo-based Newspapers' Reportage of Senate Minority Leader's defection from PDP to APC**

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### **Abstract**

*This study examined the direction, frequency and level of prominence given to the defection of former Senate Minority Leader, Senator Godswill Akpabio from the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) to the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) by The Pioneer, Ink and The Sensor Newspapers between August 2018, when the defection took place and February 2019, when the National Assembly election 2019 took place. A sample size of 242 copies of the three newspapers were content-analysed based on the census of the total editions published by the three newspapers within the period. The study found out that The Ink Newspaper, a radical privately owned newspaper had more stories on the defection in its 60 editions published within the period than The Pioneer and The Sensor Newspapers with 91 editions each. The three newspapers published more unfavourable items on the defection than neutral and favourable items. The research concluded that ownership and political parallelism have serious influence on the reportage of defections and cross carpeting within the Nigerian political space. The study recommended that objective and in-depth reportage of political issues in the media could check the excesses and lack of ideology among politicians in Nigeria and could also raise the consciousness of the electorate on the quality of representation by their elected officials so that the electorate can decide wisely in the next election period.*

### **Introduction**

Between May 29, 2007 and May 29, 2015, Senator Godswill Akpabio was the governor of Akwa Ibom State in Nigeria. Before he became the governor, he had served as a Commissioner in the State Executive Council between 2002 and 2006. As the governor of Akwa Ibom State, he played a key role in the Nigerian Governors Forum (NGF), where he was made the Chairman of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) governors' caucus within NGF. At the expiration of his two terms in office as governor, Senator Godswill Akpabio contested the Senatorial Seat of Akwa Ibom North West and won in 2015. Surprisingly, Senator Akpabio, who was a first time member of the National Assembly, was elected the Senate Minority Leader. Senator Akpabio had always enjoyed media hype in Nigeria as an outstanding governor whose performance was uncommon. So it is expected that his defection from PDP to the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) on August 8, 2018 should be newsworthy to media houses in Nigeria. One primary function of the mass media in the human society is surveillance of the environment. In her exposition of the surveillance function of the media, Hasan (2013) explains that it is the process of monitoring the behaviour of people, objects or processes within systems for conformity to expected or desired norms in trusted systems for security or social control. The press does the work of surveillance of environment through creative reportage of socio-economic and political events in the society. Pavlik & McIntosh (2011) note that surveillance function of the media refers primarily to journalism, which is aimed at providing information about the processes, issues, events and other developments in society. Through gathering,

collating and disseminating of news, the press fulfils this crucial function of surveillance. Hasan (2013) quotes Wilbur Schramm as saying "we ask the mass media to serve as our eyes and ears, sometimes our voices in distant places. We count on them to survey our environment and report it realistically to us"(p.127). According to Hasan, the people take media reports as things that affect their interest and use them to form attitudes, opinions and take decisions on issues in the society.

News on the defection of Senator Godswill Akpabio came as a surprise to many supporters of PDP within and without Akwa Ibom State. Many people interpreted the Senator's defection to the ruling party in many ways. Some had reasoned that the Senator had never played opposition politics and as such he was moving into the mainstream of national politics, while others interpreted the defection as a face-saving strategy to avoid prosecution by anti-graft agency over allegations of corruption during the eight years of his stewardship as governor of Akwa Ibom State. Some even alleged that the defection was to stop his godson, the incumbent governor, who is from another ethnic group from re-election on the platform of PDP. Dunu (2013) notes that the mass media are capable of raising the consciousness of the people on issues of governance by enhancing informed participation in the political processes, facilitating and reinforcing more equitable and inclusive policies and actions. Given this background, the press is expected to give accurate and objective information to enable the public understand the issues involved in the defection of the Senate Minority Leader from PDP to APC. The choice of *The Pioneer*, *The Sensor* and *The Ink* newspapers for this study became necessary as the three newspapers are based in Uyo, the Akwa Ibom State capital and could not have missed the defection news. *The Pioneer* Newspaper is public funded media house published by the Akwa Ibom State Government. *The Sensor* Newspaper is a private newspaper outfit, whose proprietor is a chieftain of the APC in Akwa Ibom State, while *The Ink* Newspaper is also a privately owned newspaper with radical views on issues that affect the society.

### Statement of the Problem

Objectivity, balanced and accurate reportage of issue are the hallmarks of sound journalism. Objectivity demands that the reporter presents the readers with all sides of an issue and all facts involved in the issue. This manner of presentation allows the readers to decide what facts mean and whose side they have sympathy. Hasan (2013) argues that objectivity presupposes accuracy and realism in reporting, separating facts from opinion, but treating opinion as relevant, minimising the influence of the writer's own attitude, opinion or involvement and avoiding slant or devious purposes. The Nigerian politicians have been recently castigated for allegedly lacking ideology and patriotism rather they are driven by primordial ethnic and selfish mercantile interests. It is believed that some cases of defections by our elected officials are based on personal greed and not the altruistic interest of the people. The spate of defections in Nigeria has become alarming with many defectors citing cases of division or leadership tussle within their parties as reasons for cross-carpeting. The defection of former Senate Minority Leader, Chief Godswill Akpabio, was controversial in the sense that while the Senate President Bukola Saraki along with others were defecting back to PDP, the Minority Leader was moving to APC the ruling party. He was described as an "uncommon defector" or big fish-defector into the ruling party. Nigerians had diverse opinions on the occurrence but the press as the watchdog of the society was not expected to take side given the pluralistic nature of Nigeria.

*The Pioneer* Newspaper is owned, run and controlled by the Akwa Ibom State government, which is under PDP government. *The Sensor* Newspaper is privately owned by an APC chieftain while *The Ink* Newspaper is another private media outfit without strong party affiliation. Against the backdrop of the watchdog function of the press, fair reporting and ownership interest, the concern of this study is to what extent were *The Pioneer*, *The Sensor* and *The Ink* newspapers influenced by fairness doctrine in their reportage of the defection of Senate Minority Leader from PDP to APC?

### Research Questions

1. What is the comparative publication of news stories on the Senate Minority Leader's defection from PDP to APC by *The Pioneer*, *The Sensor* and *The Ink* newspapers?
2. To what extent are *The Pioneer*, *The Sensor* and *The Ink* Newspapers neutral or balance in their reportage of the Senate Minority Leader's defection from PDP to APC?
3. What is the level of prominence given to the coverage of the Senate Minority Leader's defection from PDP to APC by *The Pioneer*, *The Sensor* and *The Ink* Newspapers?

### Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the Agenda Setting Theory and Framing Theory for its framework. Baran & Davis (2012) posit that Agenda Setting Theory and Framing are often used together as a way of developing a comprehensive strategy for examining the production, dissemination and comprehension of new stories. Under the Agenda Setting Theory, it is postulated that the mass media do more than just being the purveyor of information and that the mass media do not tell people what to think but what to think about. Baran & Davis (2012) note that it was Bernard Cohen's writing that formed the basis of the agenda-setting function of the mass media. Quoting McCombs & Shaw (1972), Baran & Davis (2012) explains that in the choice and display of news, editors, newsroom staff and broadcasters play important part in shaping political reality, adding that audience does just learn about a given issue in the media but the importance it attaches to that issue depends on the amount of information given by the media. The implication of this is that the media set agenda for public discuss. Asemah (2011) posits that the theory presupposes that most of the pictures that we store in our heads, most of the things we think or bother about, are based on what we learnt from the mass media. Folarin (1998) explains that the theory implies that the mass media can determine what issues are regarded as important at a given time in a given society. He enumerated elements in the theory to include:

- (i) The quantity or frequency of reporting;
- (ii) Prominence given to the reports – through headline display, pictures and layout in newspapers, magazines, film, graphics, or timing on radio and television.
- (iii) The degree of conflict generated in the reports; and cumulative media-specific effects over time.

Anaeto, Onabajo & Osifeso (2008) argue that the theory is good at explaining why people with similar media exposure place importance on the same issues. This brings into focus what Baran & Davis (2012) call the contemporary macro level articulation of the theory known as Agenda Building. They explain that agenda setting is primarily the micro level perspective of

discussing the effect of the media and that agenda building is the collective process in which media, government and the citizenry reciprocally influence one another in the areas of public policy. In reporting the defection of the Senate Minority Leader from PDP to APC, the role of the press would be to move from the micro level of agenda setting to the stage of agenda building where the citizens would be exposed to the issues behind the spate of defection by politicians for popular understanding and appreciation.

The Framing theory, on the other hand, deals with media contents and effects, how media messages are presented (media frames) and the resultant influence of the presentation on interpretation and perception by the audience (audience frames). In his exposition on the theory, Oriola (2017) notes that Framing theory has become attractive to researchers in the area of political communication owing to its relevance in political discourse, which, in turn, determines behavior of citizens as voters in modern democracies. He argues that research attention on framing has been focused on electioneering activities such as political campaigns, election results, intra-party and inter-party relations, policy formation, voters' perception, opinions and reactions in the political process. Musa (2017) explains that news framing is like inserting a photo into a frame. Like photo frames, news frames have double effect; they can enhance or disfigure the news presentation. A news report that is placed in a distorted frame can affect the frame of mind of the media audience for better or for worse.

Sandig (2015) asserts that frames with capacity to motivate people towards a joint action have three-fold roles. According to him, these frames include identification of a problem and its source (diagnostic framing); the proffering of a solution to the problem and concrete action plan (prognostic framing) and the call for followers to join and sustain the protest (motivational framing). Baran & Davis (2012) observe that in Framing theory, people use sets of expectations to make sense of their social world and media contribute to those expectations. The mass media do have obligation to frame the defection of Senate Minority Leader in order to sensitize the citizens on the event and the motive behind it. According to Ardevol-Abreu (2015), there is only a thin line between Agenda Setting and the Framing Theory. The Agenda Setting Theory is about the amount of attention given to an event by the media, while Framing Theory entails the way a news item is described or represented.

### **Politics of defections in Nigeria**

Political defection can be described as an event of giving up an allegiance to one political party in exchange for loyalty to another. In Nigeria, political defection occurs so often that it has become a thing of mockery among the citizens. Many times, the defectors are seen as traitors by the former parties, which consider such action illegitimate. In some quarters, the defectors are hailed especially the party that is receiving the defectors while others treat the action with contempt. Alevomi (2013) argues that democracy in Nigeria simply depicts individual's quests for recognition or self-preservation rather than the greater purpose of service to the people and nation as enshrined in the letters of the definitions of democracy. Abah (2018) notes that there is an alarming rise in organised political defections in Nigeria, describing Nigeria's version of democracy as guided democracy and a democracy for the few. Alevomi (2013) posits that Nigerian democracy has witnessed series of political defections over the years with politicians decamping from one political party to the other. This development which is generally referred to as party defection, cross- carpeting, party-switching, floor-crossing, party-hopping, canoe-

jumping, decamping, and party- jumping simply mean the same thing as defection (Malthora, 2005; Mbah, 2011).

Political party defection or party-switching occurs due to myriad of reasons such as personality clash, power tussles, crisis or division within a given party, disagreement on party's position on an issue, realization of one's personal political ambition, party leaders reneging on agreed issues of the political party probably on power sharing formula and divergent views on the operations of a political party's philosophy and ideology. According to Abimbola & Adesote (2012), there is nothing ideologically different in the manifestoes of all parties in Nigeria. They explained that the word "cross carpeting" in politics can only be relevant in a situation where parties have distinct ideologies and manifestoes. Some politicians take a deep plunge into politics and join a political party because of their selfish interest and where their pecuniary interest can be better served. Defectors from one political party to another hinged their decision on the dwindling fortunes of the party caused by its leadership crisis, lack of internal democracy and 'political' favouritism. Alevomi (2013)) contends that there is nothing wrong in people cross-carpeting if they do not find the programmes of their party in consonance with their ideals. What is bad or dubious is when politicians begin to mortgage their consciences as well as seek to pursue their private and selfish interest in the name of cross carpeting. This may have stemmed from the mere fact that politicians are dishonest, poor and desperate to hold public office as a means of accumulating wealth. In advanced democracies, cross carpeting is done on principle, rather than on selfish and personal interest.

Commenting on the defection of the former Senate Minority Leader, Senator Godswill Akpabio, Iredia (2018) notes that Akpabio was 'a big fish-defector' and his cross-carpeting into the ruling APC was slightly weightier to comprehend. Iredia described Akpabio as a missionary, who had promised to lead APC to snatch Akwa Ibom State in 2019 the way Adolf Hitler invaded Poland during the Second World War. He however opined that one aspect of Akpabio's defection plan which was controversial was his reported desire to help President Muhammadu Buhari fight against corruption and poverty, which was not a transparent area of his strength. In his home state, Akwa Ibom, the defection of Senator Godswill Akpabio was a shocker to many PDP faithful. It was Akpabio, who as a governor against all odds, single-handedly installed his successor in the 2015 general elections. Fear gripped many supporters of PDP in the state following the defection of Akpabio and like the Biblical David facing Goliath, the PDP resorted to the slogan "Only God" meaning that it surrendered to God since it cannot face Akpabio in 2019. The media were awash with the stories of this uncommon defection, hence the focus of this study is to find out the extent of fairness exhibited by *The Pioneer*, *The Sensor* and *The Ink* newspapers in their reportage of the defection of Senate Minority Leader from PDP to APC.

### **Role of the Media in reporting defections**

Traditionally, the media in Nigeria like in any other part of the world, play critical roles of informing, educating and entertaining the people. In a multi-ethnic and multi-party democracy, the press is expected to be fair and objective in reporting activities of political parties. Unfair and unbalanced journalism is capable of eroding away public confidence in the reporter or the media organization. Objectivity is expected to be the reporter's basic state of mind as he or she approaches a story. Hasan (2013) posits that political reporters in a democracy have one central

mission which is to provide citizens with the information they need to make informed choice between the candidates for election. She states further that the political reporter should have intelligence, instinctive perception of realities, good judgment of people and a strong historic sense. According to Hasan, a lot of things are happening behind the scene in politics like lobbying, image-building and hatching of conspiracies and it is the duty of the political reporters to unmask these happenings in the political world. Hasan explains that the reporter should be able to expose the naked ambitions of political leaders and the hypocrisy of political parties. "Therefore, it is the duty of the political reporter never to glorify a minister or a politician but truthfully present their achievements and failures", (Hasan, 2013, p.243).

McQuail (2008) observes that "in respect of politics, the mass media provide an arena of debate and a set of channels for making policies, candidates, relevant facts and ideas more widely known as well as providing politicians, interest groups and agents of government with means of publicity and influence" (p.4). Nwabueze (2009) notes that the political reporter should keep himself or herself abreast of the concept of politics which include issues of power, power struggle, conflicts, conflict resolution and many other activities involving decision making in political sphere. Kur (2005) opines that the success or failure of any electoral process is heavily dependent on the activities of the mass media coverage or reporting of elections.

With this in mind, the journalists covering political activities like defections or cross-carpeting are expected to be guided by the professional ethics of fairness, balance and accurate reportage. Okunna & Omenugha (2001) observe that government-owned media organisations have been known to gloss over such government 'weaknesses' as failure to create jobs, to eradicate poverty, to fund education, to provide quality healthcare. It is instructive to add here that most privately-owned media houses 'manage' or suppress news reports on non-performance or acts of misdemeanor on the part of politicians because of political parallelism or party affiliation of the proprietor. Okunna & Omenugha (2001) however opine that the role of watchdog or surveillance function of the media is better performed by the privately owned media organisations. Whether a media organization is government owned or not, it is imperative for a professional journalist to see objectivity as the guiding principle of sound practice. The public has the right to know. Hence, factual, accurate, balanced and fair reporting is the ultimate objective of good journalism and the basis of earning public trust and confidence. John & Enighe (2001) have the following views on the performance of the press in Nigeria:

- Nigerian press are always used by their owners to further their personal interests- private, party or government.
- For the propagation of the interests of such owners especially in the struggle to gain power or monopolise same.
- There is recklessness and partisanship on the part of the press during elections and transition to civil rule programme instead of restraint and responsible reporting of events.
- The principle of objectivity is always abandoned by the press in the championing of the causes of their masters' political struggles.
- Manipulations of the press to report false election results, which caused violence, mostly in the Western region, have been a common trend since independence.

More often than not the media have been accused of sensational reporting of political issues by politicians who prefer certain issues hidden from public. Given the importance of the media during electioneering, every politician tries to curry favour from them. When the politicians do not get exactly what they want, they tend to accuse the media of unprofessional conduct. The journalists do not owe the politicians any obligation rather the society, which needs the services of the journalists the most. In reporting political defections, the journalists must stand for the truth and accurate dissemination of information at all times in order to gain and sustain the confidence of the people.

### Methodology

The methodology employed in this study is content analysis. Content analysis entails a systematic, objective and quantitative analysis of the mass media message. Wimmer & Dominick (2011) explains that content analysis is a method of studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables. This method allows categorization of materials under objective criteria that make them easy for statistical analysis.

**Population:** The population of this study was 242 copies of the three newspapers- *The Pioneer*, *The Sensor* and *The Ink*. *The Pioneer* and *The Sensor* newspapers had 91 issues each, while *The Ink* had 60 issues. Both *The Pioneer* and *The Sensor* published thrice a week and as such a total of 182 copies were published by the two newspapers between August 2018 and February 2019. *The Ink* newspaper on the other hand published twice weekly and produced 60 copies within the same period. A census of the total population of 242 editions published by the three newspapers within the period was considered since there was no need for sampling given the number of editions published weekly by the three newspapers and the time frame of the study.

**Coding:** Every material on the defection of Senator Godswill Akpabio was coded under four major content directions. These are favourable, unfavourable, neutral and prominence.

-Favourable items are those that describe Senator Akpabio as asset to APC, an uncommon defector, a man that will link Akwa Ibom State with the national mainstream politics, a strong politician that will coordinate the activities of APC well in Akwa Ibom State. One that likes to play national politics to bring dividends of democracy to the people; other senatorial aspirants conceding to Akpabio; loyalists decline to contest against Akpabio.

-Unfavourable items those that describe Senator Akpabio as being afraid of EFCC and running into APC to avoid arrest; an unreliable politician who is afraid of his successor surpassing in performance; Akpabio's defection is damage to APC; Akpabio is a traitor; Akpabio's defection end to dictatorship in Akwa Ibom State; Akpabio gets more desperate; APC stakeholders frustrate Akpabio's bid to become party leader.

- Neutral items are those that will announce rallies, the personality expected at Sen. Akpabio's defection rally; the number of people expected to decamp alongside with Akpabio; Akpabio's plan to respect existing party structure in the state and news and pictures devoid of disparaging feelings.

-Prominence shows the position of the published items in the newspapers. Front page represents high, back page represents medium and inside pages stand for low.



**Unit of Analysis:** All news items on the defection of Senator Godswill Akpabio were classified under the following units of analysis: news, editorials, advertorials, features, letters, cartoons and photographs.

**Inter-Coder Reliability:** Inter-coder reliability was calculated using Holsti's formula:

Formula: 
$$r = \frac{2(C_1.C_2)}{C_1 + C_2}$$

r = correlation

C.C = the number of category assignment agreed on.

C<sub>1</sub>+ C<sub>2</sub> = the total number of category assignment made by both coders.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Therefore } r &= \frac{2(121)}{133 + 133} = \frac{242}{266} \\ &= 0.9 \end{aligned}$$

The calculation above showed that the inter-coder reliability was 90 per cent, meaning that the areas of disagreement between the two coders were only ten per cent. Hence, the coding categories were appropriate and acceptable.

**Method of Data Collection:** The 242 copies of *The Pioneer*, *The Sensor* and *The Ink* Newspapers were analysed page by page and the news reports on the defection of Senator Godswill Akpabio coded into appropriate categories and units. After coding into the various units and content categories identified, the data were quantitatively presented in tables and percentages to reflect the extent of coverage in terms of news content, direction and prominence.

**Data Presentation and Analysis**

This study intended to find out the extent of objectivity exhibited by *The Pioneer*, *The Sensor* and *The Ink* Newspaper respectively in the coverage of the defection of the former Senate Minority Leader, Senator Godswill Akpabio. Within the period, a total of 242 issues of the three newspapers were content analysed with *The Pioneer*, and *The Sensor* newspapers having 91 editions each while *The Ink* Newspaper had 60 copies.

**Table 1: Total number of the Akpabio's defection related stories published in *The Pioneer*, *The Sensor* and *The Ink* Newspapers (August 2018- February 2019)**

Newspapers	Date	Akpabio's defection related stories	Percentage
The Pioneer	Aug. 2018- Feb. 2019	27	20.3
The Sensor	Aug. 2018- Feb. 2019	30	22.6
The Ink	Aug. 2018-Feb. 2019	76	57.1
	Total	133	100

Table 1 shows that a total of 133 stories related to Akpabio's defection were published by the three newspapers within the period of the study. Out of the number, *The Pioneer* reported 27

stories accounting for 20.3%, *The Sensor* published 30 items related to Akpabio's defection, which was 22.6%, while *The Ink* reported total of 76 stories on the defection accounting for 57.1% of the defection related stories in the three newspapers.

**Table 2: Units of the Akpabio's defection related stories published in The Pioneer, The Sensor and The Ink Newspaper (August 2018- September 2019)**

Newspapers	News	Editorial	Advertorials	Opinion/Features	Letters	Cartoon	Photo	Total
Pioneer	10	1	-	12	-	-	4	27
Sensor	15	2	1	3	1	2	6	30
Ink	38	-	4	11	1	-	22	76

Table 2 shows that out of the 27 defection related stories published by *The Pioneer* on Senator Godswill Akpabio, 10 were straight news, only one editorial, 12 were features and opinions, four were photographs. *The Sensor* on the other hand published 15 news items, two editorials, only one advertorial, 3 features and opinions, only one letter to the editor, two cartoons and six photographs totaling 30 defection related stories. *The Ink* also published 38 straight news items, four advertorials, 11 features and opinions, only letter to the editorial and 22 photographs.

**Table 3: Comparison of content direction of the Akpabio's defection related stories in The Pioneer, The Sensor and The Ink Newspapers (August 2018- September 2019)**

Newspaper	Defection stories	Favourable	%	Neutral	%	Unfavourable	%	Total
The Pioneer	27	2	7.4	9	33.3	16	59.2	99.9%
The Sensor	30	6	20	8	26.7	16	53.3	100%
The Ink	76	7	9.2	8	10.5	61	80.2	99.9%

Table 3 above indicates that out of the 27 items related to Senator Akpabio's defection published by *The Pioneer*, only 7.4% of the items was favourable, 33.3% was balanced and neutral while 59.2% was unfavourable. Out of the total of 30 items published on the defection by *The Sensor*, 20% was favourable, 26.7% was neutral and balanced while 53.3% was unfavourable. *The Ink* published a total of 76 items on the defection, 9.2% was favourable, 10.5% was neutral and balanced while 80.2% was unfavourable.

**Table 4: Prominence of the Akpabio's defection related news items**

Prominence	The Pioneer	%	The Sensor	%	The Ink	%
High	6	22.2	16	53.3	22	28.9
Medium	7	25.9	4	13.3	3	3.9
Low	14	51.9	10	33.3	51	67.1
Total	27	100	30	99.9	76	99.9

Table 4 shows that out of the 27 items published by *The Pioneer* on the defection saga, six items or 22.2% was high in terms of prominence, seven items (25.9%) were medium while 14 items (51.9%) were low. *The Sensor* on its part, published 16 stories (53.3%) under high, four items (13.3%) came under medium while 10 items representing 33.3% accounted for low. *The*

*Ink* published 22 items or 28.9% under high, three items representing 3.9% came under medium while a total of 51 items (67.1%) were low.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The focus of this study was to find out the extent to which *The Pioneer*, *The Sensor* and *The Ink* newspapers were objective in their reportage of the defection of Senate Minority Leader from PDP to APC. Findings were discussed based on the research questions.

#### **RQ1: What is the comparative publication of news stories on the Senate Minority Leader's defection from PDP to APC by *The Pioneer*, *The Sensor* and *The Ink* newspapers?**

Data presented in Table 1 showed that a total of 133 stories related to the Senate Minority Leader's defection were published by the three newspapers within the period of the study. Out of the number, *The Pioneer* reported 27 stories accounting for 20.3%, *The Sensor* published 30 items related to Akpabio's defection, which was 22.6% while *The Ink* reported total of 76 stories on the defection accounting for 57.1% of the defection related stories in the three newspapers. The answer to research question is that *The Ink* Newspaper had published more items on the defection saga than *The Pioneer* and *The Sensor* Newspapers combined. The implication of this finding is that *The Pioneer* and *The Sensor* Newspapers may have been cautious in the reportage of the defection story given affiliation. The Pioneer is funded by the PDP-controlled state government while The Sensor is owned by a chieftain of APC. This finding corroborates John and Enighe (2001) that the masters' political interest often interfered with the newsworthiness of the story. This finding also justifies the application of framing theory in this study.

#### **RQ2: To what extent are *The Pioneer*, *The Sensor* and *The Ink* Newspapers neutral or balance in their reportage of the Senate Minority Leader's defection from PDP to APC?**

From the computation on Table 3, out of the 27 items related to Senator Akpabio's defection published by *The Pioneer*, only 7.4% of the items was favourable, 33.3% was balanced and neutral while 59.2% was unfavourable. Out of the total of 30 items published on the defection by *The Sensor*, 20% was favourable, 26.7% was neutral and balanced while 53.3% was unfavourable. *The Ink* published a total of 76 items on the defection, 9.2% was favourable, 10.5% was neutral and balanced while 80.2% was unfavourable. The answer to research question two is that all the three newspapers irrespective of the volume of their reportage of the defection, reported more unfavourable items on the defection than neutral or favourable. *The Ink* Newspaper published a total of 80.2% unfavourable reports meaning that anybody that had negative reports on the personality involved in the defection could easily publish it in *The Ink* Newspaper. The implication here is that political parallelism and ownership structure could not muffle the voice of the people given the widespread contempt expressed by the majority of Nigerians on the gale of defection in the National Assembly last year. This finding supports the view of Curran (2005) that in a competitive marketplace, the media only reflect what the people want, their views and interests. This finding also justifies the application of the agenda setting theory in this study.

#### **RQ3: What is the level of prominence given to the coverage of the Senate Minority Leader's defection from PDP to APC by *The Pioneer*, *The Sensor* and *The Ink* Newspapers?**

From the data in Table, out of the 27 items published by *The Pioneer* on the defection saga, six items or 22.2% was high in terms of prominence, seven items (25.9%) were medium while 14 items (51.9%) were low. *The Sensor* on its part, published 16 stories (53.3%) under high, four items (13.3%) came under medium while 10 items representing 33.3% accounted for low. *The Ink* published 22 items or 28.9% under high, three items representing 3.9% came under medium while a total of 51 items (67.1%) were low. From the above presentation, *The Sensor* Newspaper gave prominence to Senate Minority Leader's defection scoring 53.3% as against *The Ink* Newspaper that had more stories on the defection but made only 28.9% high and 3.9% medium respectively. The prominence given to the defection saga by The Sensor Newspaper supports the views of Hallin & Mancini (2005) that party-press parallelism manifests in the character of news content and degree to which media and partisan discourses coincide.

### Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is inferred that in spite of ownership structure and political parallelism, *The Pioneer*, *The Sensor* and *The Ink* Newspapers reflected the contempt that Nigerians expressed against the defection saga of the former Senate Minority Leader, Senator Godswill Akpabio. Ownership structure and political interests still influenced news judgment and volume of information carried by *The Pioneer* and *The Sensor* Newspapers respectively. *The Ink* Newspaper tended to provide more information on the defection but without striving for in-depth analysis and objectivity.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings:

- (1) The media should always reflect the wishes of the people in order to remain relevant in the social contract of being the watchdog of the society.
- (2) The media personnel in government media organisations should not always dodge contentious political issues but strive to provide balanced views from informed position.
- (3) The independent or private media houses should not allow market forces of demand and supply to becloud their sense of objectivity in the handling of news items rather the professional code of conduct should be their guiding principle.
- (4) The journalists should ensure objective and in-depth reportage of political issues in the media so as to check the excesses and lack of ideology among politicians in Nigeria and also raise the consciousness of the electorate on the quality of representation by their elected officials so that the electorate can decide wisely in the next election period.

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