

Issues in Campaign Expenditure: Tracking Political Advertorials for 2015 Presidential Electioneering Campaigns in Nigeria from the Print Media

By Tunde Salman¹

Abstract:

This paper reflects on the problematic of tracking Nigeria's 2015 presidential campaign expenditure from the angle of spending on print media adverts. In the absence of full disclosure and lack of transparency in party funding, political advertising and publicity in the print media remain almost the only means of independently estimating the amount of money spent on any significant component of campaign expenditure in the country. The methodology involves developing a tracking template for monitoring political advertorials from all print media landscape and collecting adverts rates of all the sampled prints while factoring a maximal discount threshold of 20 per cent to arrive at the final estimate of overall print media political advertising and publicity component of spending. The template also captures hidden advertisements and third party spending from more than twenty (20) national dailies tracked from 14 November 2014 – 28 March 2015. The result shows that the sum of **N3, 835, 898, 475** was spent on only one component of election campaigns output. When disaggregated, the APC Presidential candidate and his support groups spent **N724, 540, 609** while the PDP Presidential candidate and his support groups spent **N3, 111, 357, 876** respectively. The study also reveals that third party spending, particularly for PDP candidate, contributed significantly to this expenditure subhead. The implication is not farfetched that increasingly candidates are designing smarter ways of evading campaign finance rules and regulations through third party spending. Therefore, there is need to trace the sources of money being spent by these third parties.

Key words: Campaign Expenditure, Political Advertorials, and Print Media

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Introduction

The debate about party funding and campaign finance has generally revolved around the negative effects of “uncontrolled, undisclosed and opaque political finance” as a major challenge to the integrity of elections in emerging and mature democracies alike. According to the outgoing chair of Nigerian Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Professor Attahiru Muhammadu Jega, transparency of political and election campaign finance is central to a vibrant and sustainable democracy (INEC, 2015:5). It has a decisive effect on operations and quality of democracy operative in country. Thus, the issue of party and or campaign finance remains integral to sanitize Nigeria’s growing electoral democracy given the corrosive influence of money and abuse of state and administrative resources (SAR) on our electoral geography (Salman, 2015).

Money exerts far-reaching influence on our electoral democracy as it is required for the running of political parties and for the candidates to finance their campaigns (Adetula, 2014:7; Onyekpere, 2013:1). But the challenge has often been how to reduce the undue influence of money so that it does not subvert the will of the people and the democratic process. Perhaps this explains the reason why our electoral laws usually place limitations on the amount of money an individual or entity can donate for election campaigns and maximal ceiling candidates can spend in relation to different categories of electable offices in the country such as presidential, gubernatorial elections amongst others.

Campaign finance is defined as the collection of funds and expenditure in relation to election campaign (INEC, 2015:7). The Political Party Finance Handbook (PPFH) developed by the INEC describes campaign expenditure as any expenditure incurred by a party for the purposes; that is solely for the purpose, of enhancing the standing of or promoting electoral success for a party at a forthcoming or future elections. This includes issuing disparaging materials relating to another party or its candidates. Thus, for the purpose of monitoring media spending, campaign expenditure is conceptualized as “expenditure incurred by or behalf of a registered political party or candidate to promote the party and candidate at an election or in connection with future elections, including expenditure that has the aim of damaging the prospects of another party or candidate”(OSJI, 2005).

This conceptualization not only includes expenditure incurred by a political party or individual candidates, but also spending *on behalf* of political parties or candidates by third parties, such as their support groups, hidden advertisements by state and public institutions, or institutions supported by the state. Evidently, third party spending is somehow treated as both income and expenditure. This is important in order to guide in developing template for tracking campaign advertorials in the newspapers. More often than not, third party spending is often used as a way of evading legal limits on campaign expenditure, but it could also be a perfectly legitimate form of political expression for individuals and organizations (OSJI, 2005). Therefore, the line between legitimate and questionable third party spending is not always clear. The approach favoured in the literature is focusing on campaign outputs and estimating their costs or market value.

Campaign Advertorials as an Expenditure Output

Political advertising is one of the components of elections expenses. The PPFH states that campaign expenses include any expenditure incurred by a party (and candidates) in connection with the following items: political party broadcasts, advertisements, distribution of solicited and unsolicited materials to the electorate, circulation of manifesto or other policy documents, market research and canvassing, media/publicity, transportation, rallies or other events (INEC 2015:7). In matured democracies, political advertising constitutes a significant component sometimes more than half of the total election spending by candidates as many observers consider advertising as the key to modern political campaigning (See: OSJI 2005, Albert and Marco, 2010). However, in the context of emerging democracies like Nigeria, election spending on political advertisement is much lower as candidates often prioritize other categories of campaign expenditure. For example, the average share of advertising and publicity across all media platforms (print, electronic and outdoor ads) survey by National Democratic Institute (NDI) for International Affairs (OSJI 2005:54)² in 12 African countries against overall total campaign expenditure stands at mere 10 percent.

Nonetheless, in Nigeria, political advertorials especially those placed in the print media still remain very important for candidates and political parties to promote themselves to the electorate as well as countering any disparaging materials by their opponents in the press. As such, the relative importance of print media as an appropriate medium of disseminating political messages is not necessarily based on media penetration or circulation but the strategic role of the press. The assumption that most Nigerians receive their political news from newspapers than television may not be supported by empirical data. According to the 2013 Nigeria's Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) conducted by the National Population Commission (NPopC, 2014:39), only nine (9) percent of women and twenty (20) percent of men aged 15-49 read a newspaper at least once a week; meaning exposure to print media is still low in Nigeria with observable regional or zonal variation.

We need to appreciate the relative importance of print media especially the newspapers in order to determine how much attention should be given to monitoring it for campaign expenditure in Nigeria. What is the circulation of major print media in Nigeria? A study by the Advertisers Association of Nigeria (ADVAN)³ in 2010 discloses that daily sales figure of all newspapers in the country was less than 300,000 meaning that only one in every 470 Nigerians buys newspapers daily. For instance, Punch circulates only 34,264 copies, the Sun 25,241, Guardian 25,222 and Thisday 21,703, Daily Trust 11,672, the most popular newspaper up North and Tribune, the oldest surviving newspaper in Nigeria, managing only 8,314 daily sales. This ratio apparently does not consider persons and organizations that buy more than one newspaper daily. By this, the report indicates it may be more than appropriate one in every 500 Nigerians buys newspaper daily.

² A survey by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (cited in Open Society Justice Handbook) on political party financing found only 10 percent of spending earmarked for advertising in 12 African countries: Benin, Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia.

³ The report is available online at <http://www.nairaland.com/515229/nigerian-newspaper-reader-bases>

However, purchasing a newspaper is not necessarily the only indicators of exposure to print media as many people still end up reading the dailies either at the vendor stands or in their offices or libraries. Besides, election campaign periods are associated with increased readership as many people will want following political trending in the country. This is much acknowledged by the ADVAN study which discloses that the only hope of a rise in circulation income for the newspapers is the coming elections. ADVAN study notes that from 1999, elections years have always ushered in improved patronage. Therefore, it submits that with the 2011 around the corner, newspaper sales could gallop soon. The total national circulation figure of all Nigerians newspapers may not be up one million copies per day.

Whatever, unlike normal press reporting whose validity can sometimes be contested by those who might felt such reportage exaggerate, distort or under represent what really happened, for example, adverts are different. Adverts are paid for by the sponsors which enable the individuals and or groups to say what they want to say the way they would want their audience to receive the information (Albert 2010:11). Thus political advertising provides the candidates and their parties' avenue to persuade voters to vote for them. The placement of political advertising in the newspapers is one of the means by which political parties and candidates for elections communicate directly with the electorate. Accordingly, it is one way by which election campaign financing can be monitored since it constitutes one of electioneering campaign outputs with cost outlays attached. Thus, the primary objective of this paper is to share findings from monitoring spending on print media advertorials during the 2015 presidential electioneering campaigns period in Nigeria. In the absence of full disclosure and lack of transparency in party funding, political advertising and publicity in the press remain almost the only means of independently estimating the amount of money spent on any significant component of campaign expenditure in the country. Accordingly, spending on advertising is a particularly attractive target for monitoring because it often constitutes a substantial expense, and it can be monitored with a high degree of accuracy, as there is an observable record of expenditure (the advertisements themselves).

Methodology

The methodology used for the tracking exercise is based on scanning through over 20 newspapers and two magazines for sponsored political advertorials. The Nigerian Press Council and National Institute of Legislative Studies libraries provided access to their newspapers throughout the tracking period. The Centre for Social Justice also buys over 10 different newspapers daily in connection to the monitoring campaign issues. Together the researcher has access to large number of print materials to ensure that he personally peruse them for political advertorials. The raw data has since been published online⁴ covering more than PDF 160 pages. Therefore, monitoring newspapers campaign adverts is a serious undertaking as one need to collect and synthesize a vast quantity of raw data such as copies of all issue of print media monitored. The data then needs to be organized according to the

⁴ Our data is available at <http://csj-ng.org/publications/political-finance-reforms/federal-activities/>

some following criteria which may the amount of advertising space in print media occupied; aggregating and disaggregating spending by parties, candidates, and their support groups (third party) spending. Therefore, monitoring methodological consideration revolves around what to monitor and how to monitor, and sources of information.

The methodology involves developing a tracking template for monitoring political advertorials from all print media landscape and collecting adverts rates of all the sampled prints while factoring a maximal discount threshold of 20 per cent to arrive at the final estimate of overall print media political advertising and publicity component of spending. The template also captures hidden advertisements and third party spending from more than twenty (20) national dailies tracked from 14 November 2014 – 28 March 2015. The actual monitoring exercise itself is segmented into three periods; namely: pre-convention period beginning from mid November 2015 when INEC issued notice of elections to December ending when all the political parties have elected or selected their standard candidates for presidential election; the post convention period (January 1 – February 14, 2015) when candidates and their parties were expected to campaign across the country; and the polls rescheduling period (February 15 – March 28, 2015). This periodization evaluates the relative importance of different phase of electioneering campaigns. For example, the volume of advertising space purchased during the pre-party nomination period is relatively marginal compared with subsequent periods as aspirants seemed to preoccupy their campaign strategies on reaching out to party delegates.

Analyzing the Dataset⁵ on the Print Media Campaign Advertising Spending

The total number of campaign advertorials placed by the two major political parties: the All Progressive Congress (APC) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP); their presidential campaign organizations (PCO) on behalf of the two candidates; as well as their support groups (third party) across twenty (20) different newspapers and magazine for the entire campaign period covers 4,752 advertising spaces. This is disaggregated as indicated in Chart 1 and 2 as well as Table 1 and 2 respectively.

⁵ Our data is available at <http://csj-ng.org/publications/political-finance-reforms/federal-activities/>

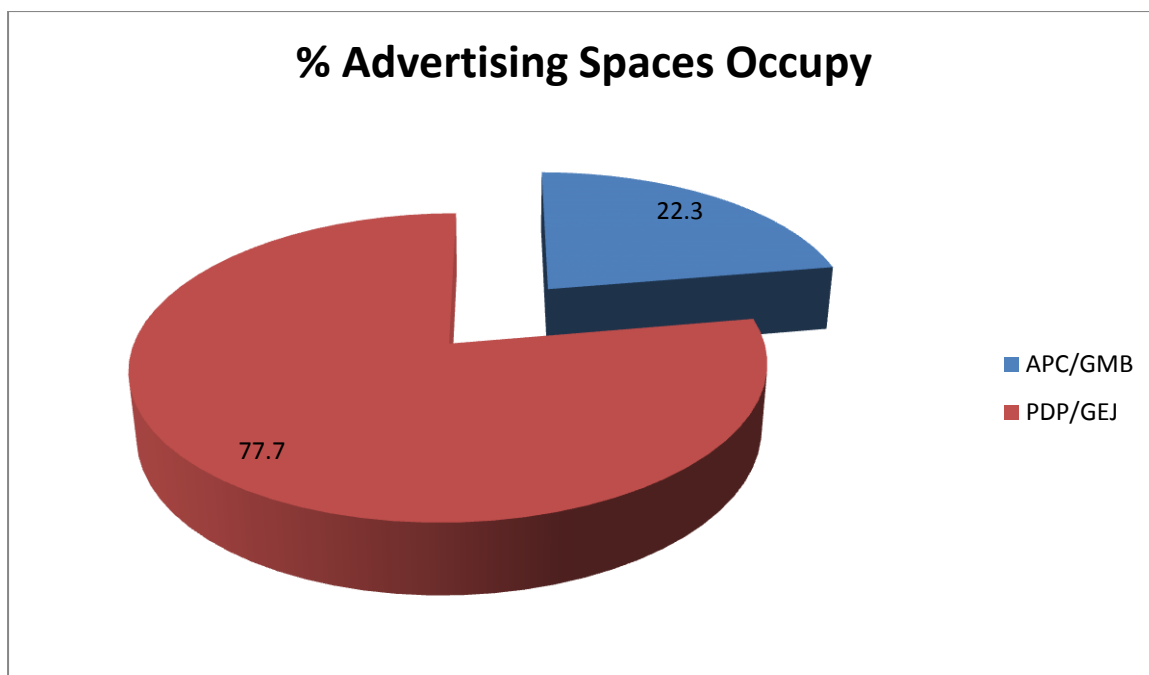


Chart 1: Percentage Advertising Spaces for the Two Candidates/Parties

Table1: Total Campaign Advertising Spaces used in the Tracked Newspapers/Magazine promoting or defending the candidature of APC Candidate General Muhammadu Buhari (GMB)

No.	Newspaper	APC	GMB	3 rd Party: (Pro- GMB)	Total
1	Blueprint	4			4
2	Business Day	2	1	1	4
3	Daily Independent			2	2
4	Daily Sun	22	3	56	81
5	Daily Trust	33	15	93	141
6	Guardian	18	4	48	70
7	Leadership	34	20	77	131
8	New Telegraph	1	2	3	6
9	Nigerian Pilot			1	1
10	Nigerian Tribune	8	6	25	39
11	Peoples Daily	1		1	2
12	Punch	24	5	72	101
13	Tell Magazine			1	1
14	The Nation	57	54	173	284
15	Thisday	17	5	83	105
16	Vanguard	29	11	48	89
Totals		250	126	685	1061

Source: Author (see: <http://csj-ng.org/publications/political-finance-reforms/federal-activities/>).

Chart 2: Composition of advertising spaces occupied by the different sponsor groups

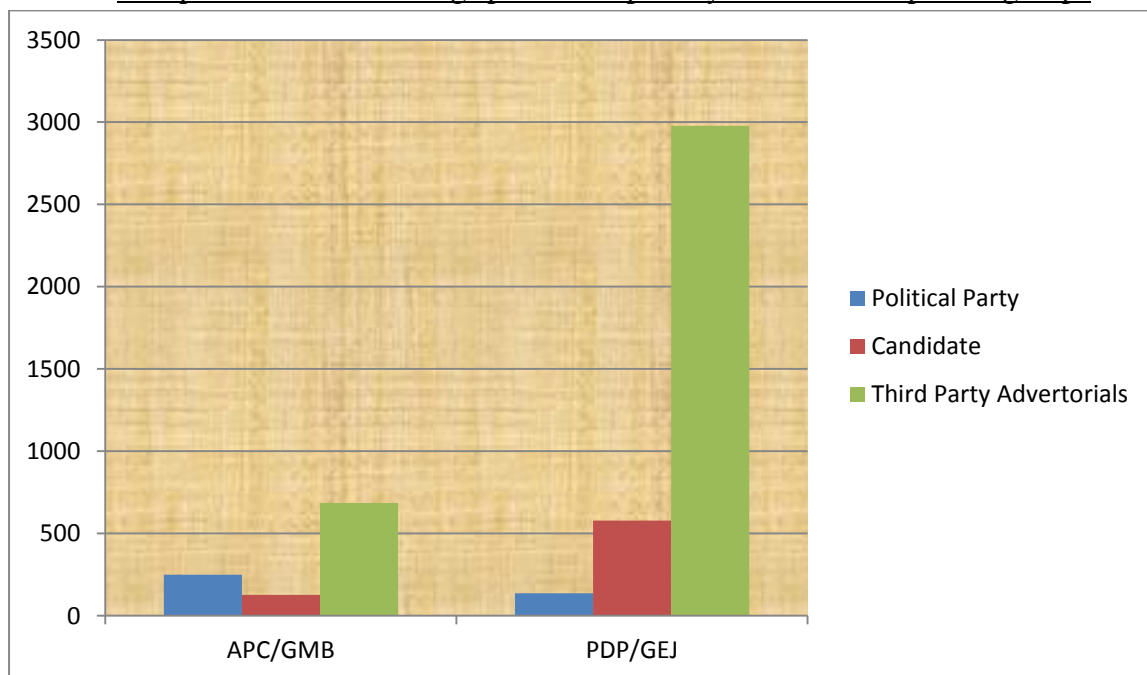


Table2: **Total Campaign Advertising Spaces used in the Tracked Newspapers/Magazine promoting or defending the candidature of PDP Candidate President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan (GEJ)**

No.	Newspaper	PDP	GEJ	3 rd Party: (Pro- GEJ)	Total
1	Blueprint		1		1
2	Business Day	2		55	57
3	Daily Independent				
4	Daily Sun	21	65	460	546
5	Daily Trust	15	44	275	334
6	Guardian	7	71	301	379
7	Leadership	7	34	195	236
8	New Telegraph	7	37	42	86
9	News Watch Times			8	8
10	Nigerian Pilot	1	18	105	124
11	Nigerian Tribune	6	72	242	320
12	Punch	24	57	241	322
13	Tell Magazine			11	11
14	The Nation	2	11	59	72
15	The News			1	1
16	Thisday	23	73	525	621
17	Vanguard	21	95	457	573
Totals		136	578	2977	3691

Source: Author (see: <http://csj-ng.org/publications/political-finance-reforms/federal-activities/>).

Summaries of Spending on Newspapers Campaign Adverts

In estimating the overall spending on newspapers adverts, official advertisement rates of all sampled were obtained to determine the cost incurred in their placement by the sponsors. A standard discount of 20 percent was used for all the adverts rates based on the average standard discount obtainable in the market. The relative category of financing agents is present in the Tables 3-5 below. The estimate shows that the aggregate sum of **N3, 835, 898, 475** was spent on only one component of election campaigns output. When disaggregated, the APC Presidential candidate and his support groups spent **N724, 540, 609** while the PDP Presidential candidate and his support groups spent **N3, 111, 357, 876** respectively.

Table 3: **Summary of cumulated Spending by APC/GMB/Pro-GMB support Groups for the entire campaign period (November 14, 2014 – March 28, 2015).**

Newspaper	December	Jan/Feb	Feb/March	Total
Blueprint		2,982,032		2,982,032
Business Day		2,992,500		2,992,500
Daily Independent			1,155,524	1,155,524
Daily Sun	3,759,845	26,721,680	16,994,710	47,476,235
Daily Trust	12,519,179	38,450,417	40,495,956	91,465,552
Guardian	4,225,722	27,039,104	13,984,289	45,249,115
Leadership		48,194,802	78,845,313	127,040,115
New Telegraph			4,380,600	4,380,600
Nigerian Pilot			5,500,000	5,500,000
Nigerian Tribune	490,000	12,022,500	9,719,850	22,232,350
Peoples Daily		1,000,000		1,000,000
Punch	5,504,923	46,684,056	24,227,634	76,416,613
Tell Magazine		482,664		482,664
The Nation	16,202,389	78,924,255	75,645,740	170,772,384
Thisday	5,625,000	50,312,500	16,762,550	72,700,050
Vanguard	2,270,000	29,325,125	21,118,750	52,713,875
Totals	50,597,058	365,131,635	308,830,916	N724,559,609

At a staggering consolidated spending outlay of over N3billion, the PDP, its presidential candidate and pro-Goodluck Eleble Jonathan support groups overshoot the spending limit by more than 200 percent on print media advertisement alone yet percentage share of advertising and publicity against total campaign spending is less than a quarter of the overall. Using total spending of N3, 111,357,876 and total number of PVCs collected (56,350,776), the PDP candidate spent only about N55 to per PVCs collected.

Table 4: **Summary of cumulated Spending by PDP/GEJ/Pro-GEJ support Groups for the entire campaign period (November 14, 2014 – March 28, 2015).**

Newspaper	December	Jan/Feb	Feb/March	Total for PDP/GEJ
Blueprint		199,500		199500
Business Day		18,574,500	14,332,500	32907000
Daily Sun	32,450,667	199,176,774	242,682,805	474,310,246
Daily Trust	24,718,827	103,802,418	123,556,267	252,077,512
Guardian	17,073,000	153,030,064	168,329,332	338,432,396
Leadership		57,969,124	157,765,680	215734804
New Telegraph		6,888,525	99,843,128	106731653
News Watch Times			11,340,000	11340000
Nigerian Pilot		40,276,250	48,832,500	89108750
Nigerian Tribune	6,595,010	99,721,125	178,319,010	284,635,145
Punch	23,299,281	106,625,791	156,060,256	285,985,328
Tell Magazine		7,205,288		7205288
The Nation	5,271,145	17,483,182	19,672,877	42,427,204
The News		500,000	310,013,550	310513550
Thisday	23,450,000	179,373,500	269,067,875	471,891,375
Vanguard	17,325,000	170,533,125		187,858,125
Totals	150,182,930	1,161,359,166	1,799,815,780	3,111,357,876

Source: Author

One way of trying to limit the amounts spent on election campaigns (and reduce the advantages of those with access to significant funds) is to impose spending limits. To get a better idea of the relative size of the spending limits, we need to take into account the size of the respective electorates. Per capita figures show that presidential candidates is allowed to spend about N15 per registered voter and N18 per numbers of permanent voters cards (PVCs) collected as at March 17, 2015. This is ludicrous perhaps the more reasons why some people query the appropriateness of arbitrary spending limits imposed on campaign finance. Adetula (2014:4) observes that while some are advocating new laws to ease existing regulation on election expenses, either by complete removing spending ceilings, or by setting higher limits, others are pushing for more restrictions to curtail lavish spending on elections. He contends that rather than stating a particular amount as the limit of expenses on election, it would have been worth considering empowering INEC to issue guidelines that deal with the problem of campaign finance from time to time. He recalls that no ceiling was placed as to the amount of money that parties and candidates could spend on elections in previous electoral period in Nigeria democratic evolution.

Who are the (financial) beneficiaries of campaign spending in Nigeria? Undoubtedly, the newspapers proprietors, journalists, and political strategies and adverts executive are the beneficiaries of the spending. Chart 3 shows the highest share of top beneficiary newspapers in terms of advert revenue from the presidential elections campaign.

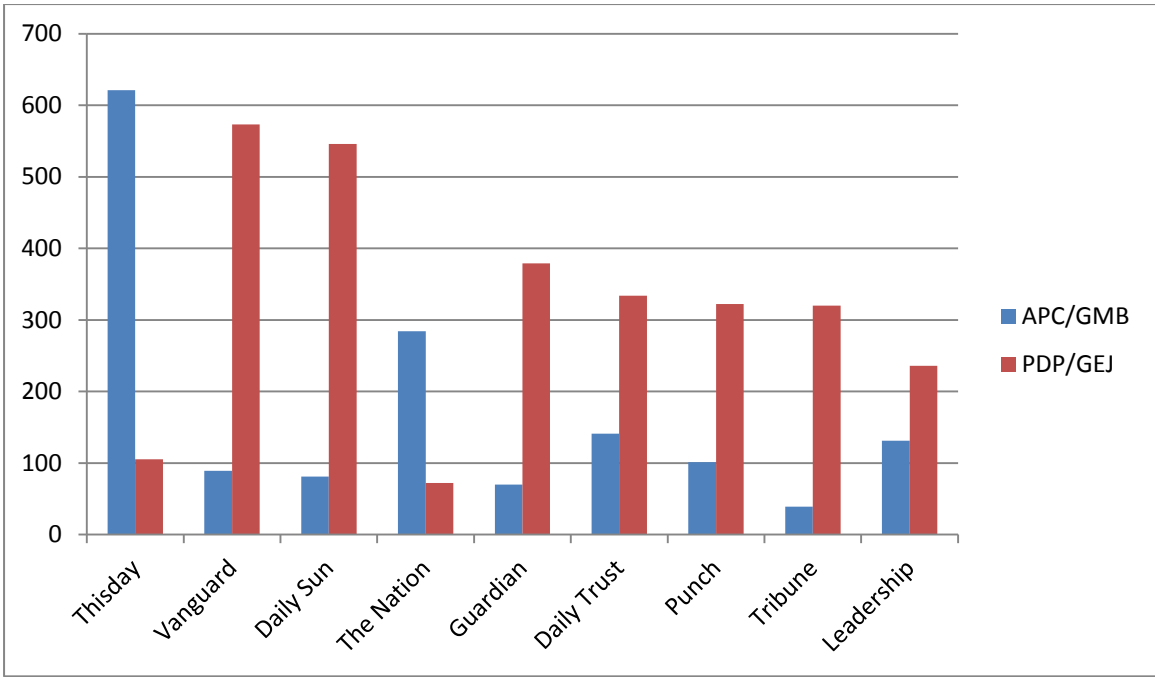


Chart 3: Beneficiary of Newspapers adverts

Conclusion

Transparency of political party and election campaign finance is central to a vibrant and sustainable democracy. Yet apart from the difficulty to access data showing the cost of election campaigns and other related activities, there have been few studies on political financing in emerging democracies. More so, there have been growing definitional, methodological and or theoretical concerns while researching into political and campaign finance in the new democracies like Nigeria. Yet some civil society actors have been exploring ways to overcoming the challenge. As part of civil society initiative to monitor campaign finance issues focusing on presidential electioneering campaign expenditure, the paper reflects on the problematic of tracking the Nigeria’s 2015 presidential campaign expenditure from the angle of the spending on political advertising and publicity in the print media. The result shows that the sum of **N3, 835, 898, 475** was spent on only one component of election campaigns output. When disaggregated, the APC Presidential candidate and his support groups spent **N724, 540, 609** while the PDP Presidential candidate and his support groups spent **N3, 111, 357, 876** respectively. The study also reveals that third party spending, particularly for PDP candidate, contributed significantly to this expenditure subhead. The implication is not farfetched that increasingly candidates are designing smarter ways of evading campaign finance rules and regulations through third party spending. Therefore, there is need to trace the sources of money being spent by these third parties.

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