

Research Article

Renaming for Power: A Content Analysis of News Reportage on Tinubu's Infrastructural Legacies

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Abstract:

This paper investigates the symbolic politics behind the renaming of public infrastructure during President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's administration, with a focus on how Nigerian media frame these acts of political memorialization. Anchored in Agenda-Setting Theory, the study conducts a content analysis of 12 news articles published between 2024 and 2025 across four prominent Nigerian news platforms; Daily Trust, Punch, This Day, and Daily Post. The selected reportage covers the renaming of major national landmarks, including the International Conference Centre in Abuja, the Minna Airport, and the inauguration of the Bola Ahmed Tinubu Barracks. By quantitatively examining word frequency through content analysis, the study explores how news media either reinforce or contest the symbolic capital embedded in infrastructural renaming.

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The findings suggest that the media act not only as channels of information but as active players in legitimizing or challenging presidential legacy-building. Varying coverage styles; ranging from celebratory framing to subtle critique, reveal underlying editorial ideologies and political alignments. This paper argues that infrastructural renaming serves as a discursive strategy of power inscription, while media reportage functions as a key arena for shaping national memory and contesting historical narrative ownership. Ultimately, the paper contributes to discussions on media framing, postcolonial leadership symbolism, and the instrumentalization of public memory in Nigerian democracy.

Keywords: Tinubu, Content Analysis, Agenda Setting Theory, News Reportage, Nigeria

Introduction

Research Background and Significance

The media remains a critical actor in contemporary society, shaping how political events, social symbols, and national legacies are perceived and interpreted. As an integral part of the public sphere, it not only reports but also frames events in ways that influence public understanding and set the tone for political discourse. In contexts of political transition or consolidation, symbolic acts, such as the renaming of infrastructure, become powerful tools through which leaders seek to inscribe their authority, claim legitimacy, and embed their legacies within the national consciousness. The media's role in mediating these symbolic acts is therefore crucial to understanding the broader dynamics of power, memory, and identity in governance.

In recent years, Nigeria has witnessed a wave of infrastructural renaming under the administration of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu. These acts include the rechristening of iconic sites such as the International Conference Centre in Abuja, renamed after the president himself; the Minna Airport, now bearing his name; and the inauguration of a newly constructed Bola Ahmed Tinubu Barracks. These renamings are not merely administrative decisions, they are strategic performances of legacy building, memory politics, and symbolic power inscription. As these developments unfold, the Nigerian media have reported and interpreted them through various frames, reflecting both overt and subtle political alignments. Whether through celebratory coverage, critical commentary, or neutral reportage, the media play a decisive role in either legitimizing or challenging such symbolic acts of governance.



Despite the significance of these developments, there remains limited scholarly attention to how the media report on infrastructural renaming and the broader implications such reportage has for public memory and political legitimacy in postcolonial Nigeria. While previous studies have focused on media and gendered framing during election campaigns or conflict reportage (Luka & Ugondo, 2025), this paper shifts the analytical lens toward the politics of symbolic naming as mediated through the press. Anchored in the Agenda-Setting Theory, which posits that media do not tell people what to think, but what to think about (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), this study interrogates the extent to which the media prioritize, frame, and tone these naming events as part of the national narrative.

This paper conducts a content analysis of 12 news articles published between 2024 and 2025 across six major Nigerian news platforms: Daily Trust, Punch, This Day and Daily Post. The analysis focuses on headline language, tone, thematic focus, and article placement, with the aim of uncovering how media outlets either reinforce or resist the symbolic capital embedded in these naming gestures. By highlighting varying editorial ideologies, the paper explores how media narratives actively participate in the construction of political legitimacy and national memory. Ultimately, this study contributes to emerging discourses on media framing, postcolonial leadership symbolism, and the politics of remembrance in Nigeria's democratic landscape.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

- 1) To examine how Nigerian mainstream media report on the renaming of public infrastructure under President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's administration.
- 2) To analyze the framing styles; celebratory, critical, or neutral used in media coverage of infrastructural renaming.
- 3) To investigate the role of media tone, headline language, and thematic emphasis in shaping public perception of political legacy-building.
- 4) To assess how the media serve as instruments for legitimizing or contesting presidential symbolic power.
- 5) To explore the influence of editorial ideologies and political alignments on reportage of symbolic naming.



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- 6) To contribute to scholarly discourse on agenda-setting and media framing in postcolonial Nigerian politics.

Theoretical Framework

Agenda Setting Theory

Agenda-Setting Theory, established by McCombs and Shaw (1972), posits that news media shape public discourse by selectively emphasizing certain issues through repeated coverage and prominent placement. While not determining how audiences interpret these issues, this gatekeeping function systematically influences which topics gain public attention. As Nwaoboli (2023) confirms, the media is particularly effective at controlling the salience of issues (what people think about) rather than deepening substantive understanding (what people think).

Methodology

The research employs a quantitative content analysis with focus on 4 online Nigerian newspapers: Daily Trust, Punch, ThisDay, Daily Post. These newspapers were selected based on their national reach and political coverage which makes them most suitable for the purpose of the research.

The research focused on 12 news articles published between 2024 and 2025 whose contents were all related to the focus of the study (infrastructural naming and renaming). The contents of these news articles are analysed with the text analysis tool called Voyant tools. This is achieved through examining the:

- Tone (positive, negative or neutral)
- Choice of key terms
- Framing differences

Results and Discussions

For analysis of the Corpus, Voyant tools was used in identifying the most frequent used words in the news articles from each of the newspapers. The words were then ranked in accordance with their frequencies and the analysis focused on the top 10 words with the most frequencies of occurrences from each newspapers.

The frequency analysis of the most frequent words in the articles analysed are presented below in Figure 1 - 4.

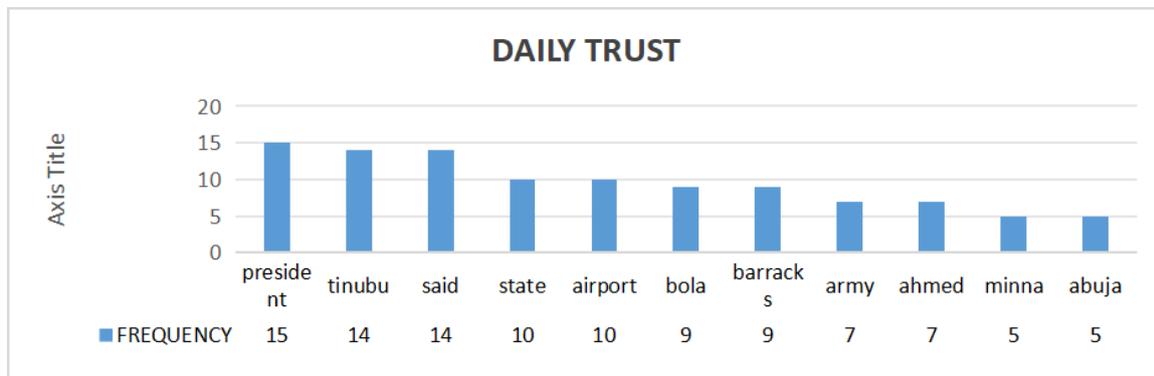


Figure 1. Frequency analysis of top 10 words with most frequency in Daily Trust articles.

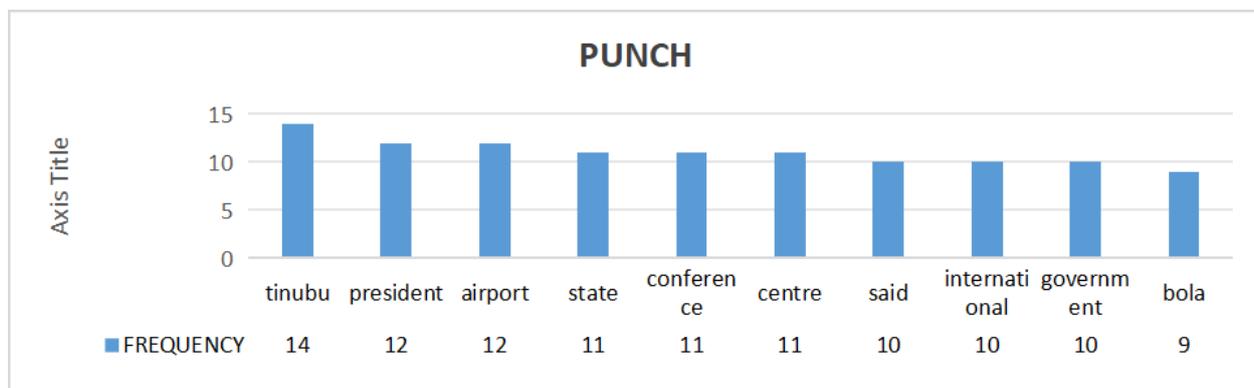


Figure 2. Frequency analysis of top 10 words with most frequency in Daily Trust articles.

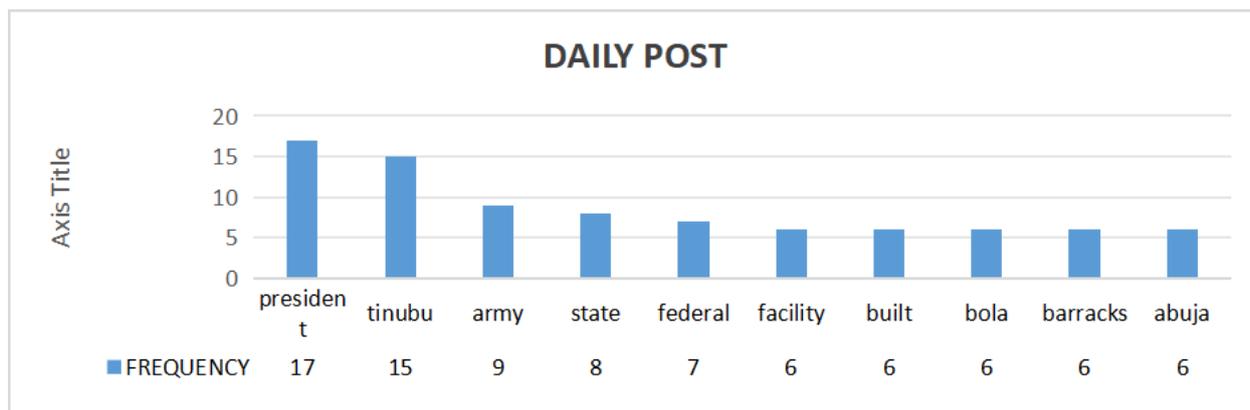


Figure 3. Frequency analysis of top 10 words with most frequency in Punch articles.

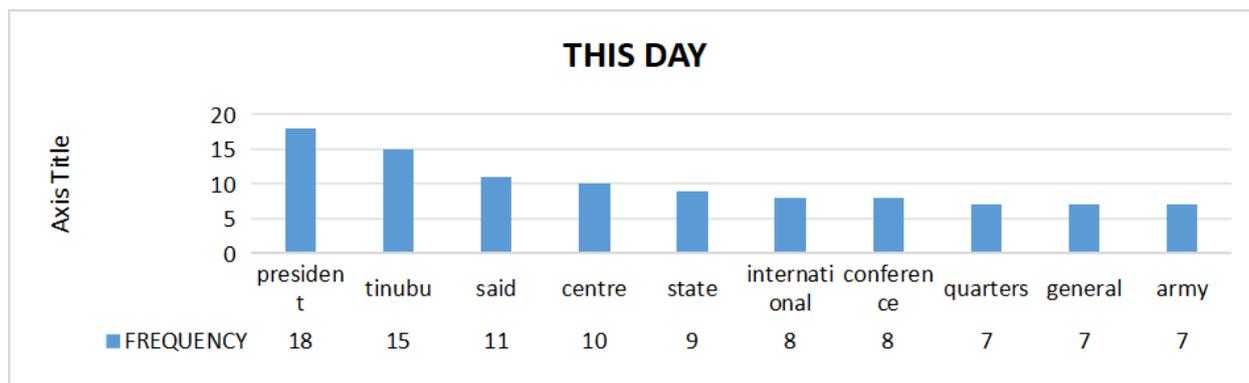


Figure 4. Frequency analysis of top 10 words with most frequency in *This Day* articles.

Observing the frequency analysis of news articles across the 4 newspapers under study, the first obvious pattern that can be noticed is the frequency of the use of the word ‘President’ and ‘Tinubu’ which is the name of the President. These two words have the highest frequencies across all fronts. Despite the words having the highest frequencies across all newspapers, it is also noteworthy that the frequency differs from one newspaper to the other. Punch downplays the use of the word as the newspaper has the lowest total frequency of 26 while *This Day* has the highest total frequency of 33 for both words. This aligns with the Agenda setting salience principle as the emphasis shows him as the central figure of the events. It can also be observed that Punch newspaper places more emphasis on the personalization of the President by using his name ‘Tinubu’ as compared to other newspapers where emphasis is placed on the political office of the President than his person.

A notable distinction between Daily Post’s reportage and that of other newspapers is the omission of the word ‘said’ whose frequency ranks highly across other newspapers. This shows a different style of reportage which focuses on presenting information as facts rather than attributed speeches through the use of the word ‘said’. This depicts Daily Post as only a neutral conveyor of information without emphasizing the speakers behind the facts. Performative and result oriented words such as ‘assured’, ‘built’, ‘described’ were also used in the reportage to prioritize outcomes over political discourse as observed in other newspapers.

The second part of the corpus analysis focuses on analyzing the overall frequency of words across the four newspapers to determine if the same words with the highest frequencies in the individual analysis retain their position. The chart in Figure 5 captures the results.

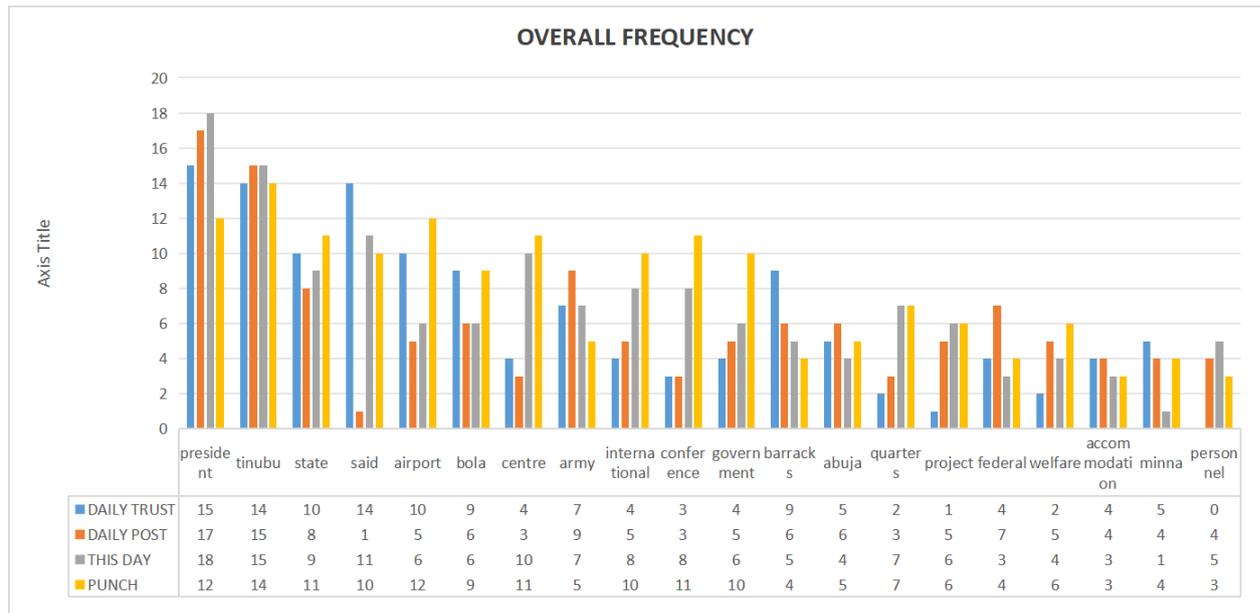


Figure 5. Overall frequency analysis of top 20 words with most frequency in all 4 newspapers.

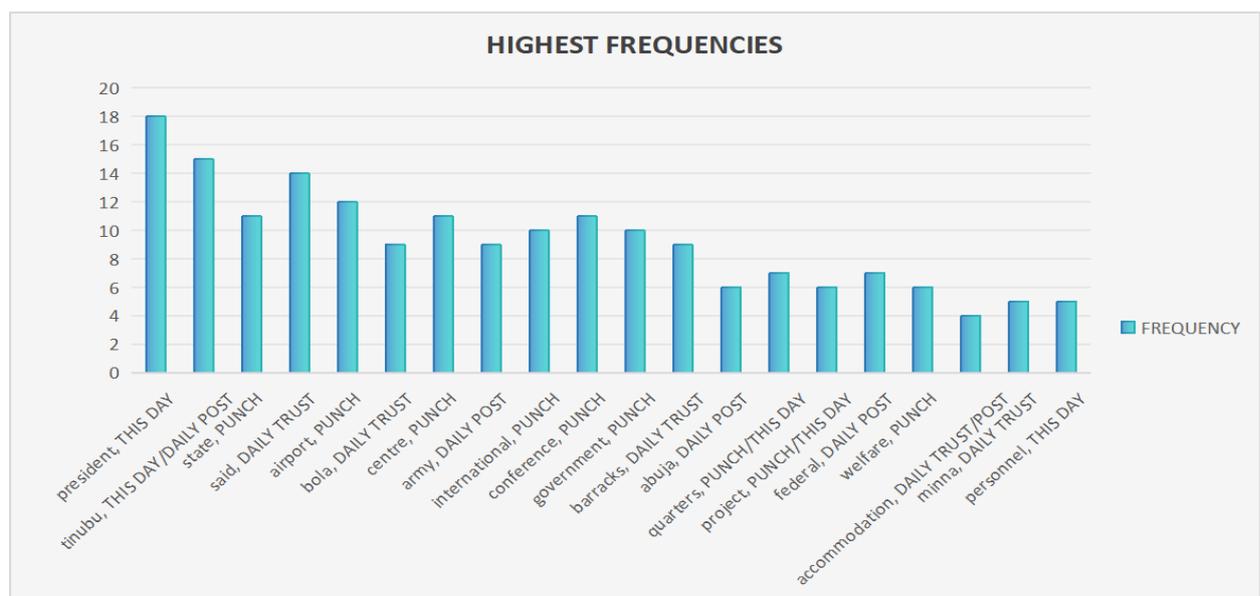


Figure 6. Overall frequency analysis of newspaper with highest frequency for each words in the list of top 20 words with most frequency.

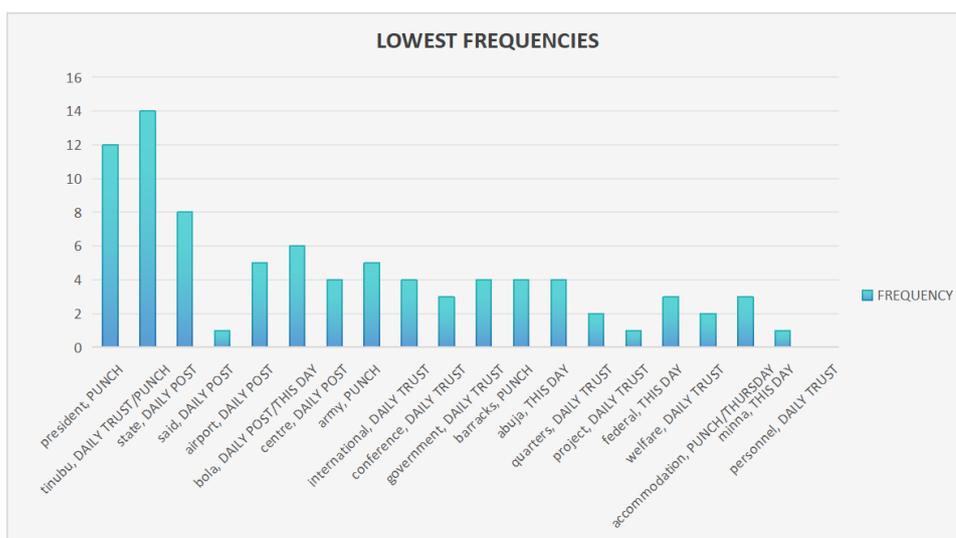


Figure 7. Overall frequency analysis of newspaper with lowest frequency for each words in the list of top 20 words with most frequency.

In the overall frequency analysis, the following can be observed about the reportage from the newspapers.

Daily Post: The Newspaper has the highest frequencies overall for words that include “Tinubu (alongside This Day), Army, Abuja, Federal, and Accomodation”. These words suggest the reportage’s emphasis on personalization of the events reported around the person of the President (Tinubu). It also shows the leaning towards governmental institutions and the military through emphasizing words like Abuja which is the Federal Capital Territory, “Federal” and “Army”.

On the other hand, some of the overall less emphasized words in Daily Post’s reportage include “State, Said, Airport, Bola (alongside This Day), and Centre”. This further supports the claim that the reportage prioritizes presidential centrality and institutional power to the discussion as keywords like “Airport” and “Centre” which are two of the infrastructures being renamed are less prioritized. Also, the less frequent mention of “Bola” which is the first name of the President suggests an attempt to not overpersonalize the narrative. This suggests a formal tone rather than an informal one. The minority use of “said” has also been extensively discussed earlier in the research.

This Day: The words with highest overall frequencies for This Day include “President, Tinubu (alongside Daily Post), Quarters, Project, Personnel”. The prominent use of the word “President” suggests that the narrative prioritizes the President as an institution and personalization of the reportage. Daily Post only



places emphasis on personalization without strongly emphasizing the institutional narrative. The emphasis on the word “Quarters” adds a military leaning to the reportage while “Projects” also aligns the framing with the developmental discourse as a part of governance. This extends the scope of the discussion beyond just personalization and institutional power to also portray the activity of naming and renaming as an achievement. The word “Personnel” also suggests an attempt to add the human element to the activity being reported thereby making it not just about institutions and infrastructures but also about people (the governed).

Punch: “State, Airport, Centre, International, Conference, Government, Quarters, Project, Welfare” are the words with which Punch newspaper have the highest overall frequencies. Majority of the words in Punch’s reportage are infrastructural and development centred.

Lowest frequency words across boards for Punch were “President, Tinubu (alongside Daily Trust), Army, Barracks, and Accomodation”. These words show Punch’s obvious attempt to downplay emphasis on the military and its associated terms and the less prominence of the words “President” and “Tinubu” points towards making infrastructure and development the core of the narrative as contrasted to other Newspaper’s focused on the person and institution of the president.

Daily Trust: The words with overall highest frequency for Daily Trust are “Bola, Barracks, Accommodation, Said, and Minna”. The prominence of the word “Bola” emphasizes the personalized framing of the narrative while omitting the political office. “Barracks” and “Accommodation” emphasizes the prioritization of military infrastructures while “Minna” which is a geographical location of the Airport which is one of the renamed infrastructures adds a localized and regionalized dimension to the subject of the reportage.

“Tinubu (alongside Punch), International, Conference, Government, Quarters, Project, Welfare, Personnel”. “Tinubu” the president’s surname having less prominence in contrast to his first name “Bola” having high frequency points to Daily Trust’s attempt to set the tone of the reportage as informal through addressing the President by his first name and giving less emphasis to his surname or the political office. Also, the less frequency associated with words like “Quarters”, “Project”, “Welfare” also indicates the Newspaper pays less attention to development and citizen-centered narratives as compared to military and infrastructural centered ones.



Conclusion

From the analysis of the four newspaper reportages, it can be observed that different newspapers report similar events with the goal of emphasizing varying details that align with the narratives they aim to push. For example in the corpus, Daily Post and This Day place prominence on President Tinubu as the central element of their narrative amongst other details discussed in the reportage. Punch emphasizes development and infrastructure while nearly omitting details that are associated with the military or the office of the President. Lastly, Daily Trust also emphasizes the personalization of the narrative around the President while also downplaying infrastructure and governance based narratives.

This research aligns with the notion of Agenda Setting theory and portrays how the media subtly guides its audience to details of events and happenings which they consider to be noteworthy and of high importance.

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