A Synthesis of the Role of Media Reports and Elections in Nigerian Democracy

By

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Abstract

This paper examines the interplay between the media and the elections in Nigeria, and discusses some of the relevant communication models that could assist the media in effectively reporting future elections in the country. This study has employed a historical approach, and argues that since Nigeria attained its political independence in 1960; conducting free and fair elections has been the major political problem in the country. The paper observed that the June 12 1993 Presidential Elections resulted in a stalemate, while the 2007 Elections were flawed with cases of electoral irregularities. Many of the results of the elections that were approved earlier by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) were later cancelled by the Nigerian Judiciary, a confirmation that the elections were rigged as confirmed by most of the internal and the external observers that monitored the elections. As a part of the solutions to the problem of elections in Nigeria, this paper recommends the establishment of an Inter-Party Central Committee (ICPP), made up of the national executives of the registered political parties, to work in collaboration with the media as the committee supports the electoral commission to conduct free and fair elections in the country.

Key words
News Media, Mandate, Election and Electoral malpractice

Introduction

The Nigerian political arena is comprised of two seemingly separate elites. The first group is made up of the senior citizens who witnessed the Nigerian political independence in 1960, and have since witnessed variety of constitutional developments in the country. The second group of the elite are the relatively young men and women, among whom are to be found the political sons and daughters of the older group. Although most of the political positions in Nigeria today are occupied by the latter group, it is the older politicians that dictate the pace of the nation's politics. It is quite remarkable that the views of the older politicians on public issues continue to form the basis of media reports on Nigerian politics. This was evident in the annulment of the June 12 1993 Presidential Election. It was that

election that confirmed the use of esoteric political modalities by the ruling elite in choosing who should occupy important political positions in the country. Nigerians in that election unanimously voted for Chief M.K. O Abiola as the President Elect. Unfortunately, the Nigerian military, together with a few traditional rulers, did not think that Chief Abiola possessed what it takes (inexact criteria) to rule Nigeria. Therefore, General Sanni Abacha later imprisoned the symbol of the people's mandate in the election, Chief M. K. O. Abiola, for declaring publicly that he had won the election. Chomsky's description of the British elite's perception towards its fellow citizens gives an insight to how some Nigerian politicians equally feel about the ability of other citizens:

> The compelling moral principle is that the mass of the public are just too stupid to be able to understand things. If they try to participate in managing their own affairs, they are just going to cause trouble. Therefore, it would be immoral and improper to permit them to do this [even if they win elections] (Chomsky, 2000, p. 17).

Ironically, it was the sudden death of Chief MKO Abiola, and the fear of the possible disintegration of the country in the wake of public the disaffection that followed the annulment of the June12 Presidential Election that led to the sudden exit of the military from Nigerian politics, and created the platform for the birth of the Nigerian Fourth Republic on 29 May 1999. It is worthwhile noting that since gaining political independence, Nigeria has not conducted any successful elections comparable to Ghana's elections in 2008, apart from the June 12 1993 Presidential Elections that were later cancelled by General Ibrahim Babangida. Moreover, the results of the 2007 Nigerian elections were particularly worrisome because of the kind of electoral irregularities that characterised the conduct of the elections. The Commonwealth Election Monitoring Committee was among those that condemned the high rate of malpractice that occurred during the elections.

Therefore, some people believe that if Nigeria's current democratic effort succeeds, it will largely be determined by the Federal Government's commitment towards a transparent electoral process and the willingness to adopt a reverse position on its current passive approach to the anti- corruption crusade in the country. It will be recalled that the first coup in Nigerian politics, which brought General Aguiyi Ironsi to power in January 1966, came as a result of the wholesale electoral malpractice that characterised the 1964/65 elections. All the other seven military governments that came to power thereafter, succeeded on the crest of public disappointment over the collective failure of the elected representatives in the state and national assembly (Oboh, 2008). In fact, the root cause of the leadership crisis in the African region today can be traced to the inability of the leaders to conduct free and fair elections in the continent. It is quite unfortunate that despite the disadvantaged position of the developing nations in the current global economic order, where globalisation is dotted with the specks of isolationist tendencies, the ineptitude and corruption of some of the leaders seem to have compounded the problems of the African Continent. Corruption moves freely in many developing nations because of the absence of transparent and convincing political systems. Given this background therefore, there is no reason why the news media should compromise their position in the subsequent elections, bearing in mind that the negative consequences of a misguided election usually result in public agitation over government sponsored electoral misconduct. Furthermore, the future generations of Nigeria may one day arise and wonder why the nation stayed so long in obscurity, dwelling on complex arguments over obvious national problems that could have easily been resolved if all the politicians had emulated the legacies of the Nigerian nationalists.

The criticisms against the results of the 2007 elections notwithstanding, the final outcome of the elections was better than all the previous elections held in the country. This was

because the Nigerian Judiciary was able to restore most of the stolen mandates of the elections to their rightful owners. Omotola (2009) commended the Nigerian judiciary over the 2007 Elections when he stated that the confidence the citizens now have in the judiciary was understandable, given its increasing assertiveness, epitomised by the notable landmark judgments delivered by the courts and tribunals on the petitions brought forward by the aggrieved candidates who contested in the elections. Nevertheless, it was the video clips and the coverage on how some of the major electoral irregularities were carried out by politicians during the voting exercise, which provided the evidence that assisted the electoral tribunals to deliver justice to the claims and objections raised by the aggrieved candidates regarding the electoral process. While assessing the credibility of the conduct of elections in Africa, Whitfield (2009) disclosed that:

> During the 2008 elections, the international news media judged Ghana in the context of the 2007 Kenyan elections, which unexpectedly erupted in violence and a stalemate; the 2008 electoral violence stalemate in Zimbabwe and the 2007 fraudulent elections in Nigeria.

With this kind of record, it is necessary that the media constantly remind the Federal Government of its constitutional responsibilities in the conduct of the elections. It has been observed that one of the reasons why most electoral commissions in Africa are unable to conduct free and fair elections in the region is because of the undue influence the executive arm of government usually brings to bear on the leadership of these commissions. Therefore, it is commendable that the National Assembly has reviewed the electoral act in the 1999 Nigerian Constitution in line with Justice Muhammed Uwais' Committee Report on Nigerian Electoral Reform.

It is pertinent to mention that this committee was set up by the Federal Government among other functions, to investigate and recommend how the Independent National Electoral Commission can enjoy an apparent autonomy similar to that of the Nigerian Judiciary.

Dewar (2009, p.1) argued in support of an independent electoral commission, which necessitated the review of the Nigerian electoral laws:

> A truly independent and capable electoral administration is absolutely invaluable for the perception of citizens; in any country in the world, the Head of the electoral administration and Commissioners need to be seen by everyone as independent persons with independent reputations.

Notwithstanding, having an independent electoral commission does not, it itself, guarantee that there would be free and fair elections in Nigeria. It would equally be necessary that other relevant agencies like the media and the police give their maximum support to the electoral commission if there were ever to be free and fair elections in Nigerian democracy. It is the responsibility of the Nigerian mass media to monitor the conduct of elections, and observe in their reports the records of influence and power being exercised by the Federal Government over the activities and decisions of the Independent National Electoral Commission.

It is important to recall that it was the investigative report written by Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward on the attempts made by President Richard Nixon to influence the electoral process in the United States that led to the removal of President Nixon from office. These journalists carefully investigated and uncovered the secret and scandalous invasion made by President Nixon into the Democratic Party National Headquarters at the Watergate Hotel in Washington DC, where documents were stolen, which he had intended to use against his opponent in the subsequent presidential election. But following the publication of this story, President Nixon voluntarily resigned from office on 9 August 1974 (Oboh, 2007) The aim of this paper therefore, is to examine the role of the media in the conduct of the elections in Nigeria but with a focus on how the media can provide the necessary

information network required for the smooth conduct of the subsequent elections in the country.

Theoretical Foundation

The Spiral of Silence Theory, authored by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann in 1974, is the intellectual construct for this paper. The theory analyses the effect of the media on voters' changes in attitude toward political candidates in elections. The author was particularly interested in finding out how the results of the voters' rating of political parties reflected on the victory of the Christian Democrats in the 1965 German national elections. Noelle-Neumann reported that it was the awareness created by the media over the results of the prior election survey, where the Christian Democrats would have defeated the Social Democrats by 4 per cent, that attracted more people to support the party, thereby leading to its victory during the actual general elections. The argument was that, as journalists were reporting on the victory of the Christian Democrats in the pre-election survey; in the process, they were unconsciously providing more information on the strengths of the Christian Democrats, which would be the reason why many people later voted for the party during the elections. Noelle-Neumann (1991) revealed that:

> Shortly before the elections, the neck-and-neck race between the two parties was resolved in the direction suggested by the expectations of who was going to win [in the elections based on the results from the survey]. In the last two weeks preceding the elections, the Christian Democrats gained almost 4% of the vote and the Social Democrats lost approximately 5%.

Since no one wants to be associated with failure, it was not surprising that some voters later defected to the Christian Democrats that won the general elections. The basic assumptions of this theory are that: society threatens deviant individuals with isolation. The fear of being isolated from others is the reason why most people constantly assess the 'climate' of opinion around them before openly declaring their own stance on any issue. It should be

noted, however, that the Spiral of Silence was specifically developed to explain the reasons for the observed changes in the attitudes and interests of voters during the 1965 German elections. It was for this reason that the author advised that other related theories to the spiral of silence must be evaluated on the basis of the ability or inability of each theory, to explain the reason adduced for the observed changes in public opinion (Noelle-Neumann, 1991).

The press accords legitimacy to public issues and sets an agenda to determine the prevailing public opinion on government policy agenda. Correspondingly, it is the attention that journalists give to the issues regarding elections that determine the value and interests the public will show towards the elections. It is logical to argue that whatever issues the media ignore in their reports, are considered to be irrelevant by the members of the public. Therefore, both the actions and inactions of the media regarding any important public issue have some kinds of meanings when evaluated within the 'court' of public opinion. The perceptions of a 'climate' of opinion that people formed from mass media presentations, could encourage some people to speak out, and express their viewpoints, while others withdraw from public debate. People keep silent in public functions sometimes to avoid being embarrassed for maintaining a minority position on a seemingly controversial issue (Noelle- Neumann 1984 &1991). This theory explains why voters are most likely to change their voting pattern to favour the party and candidates that the media and the general public assessed to have better chances of winning elections than the candidates that lack media support, notwithstanding their competence and skills to serve the public.

However, the emergence of the Spiral of Silence Theory generated controversy among scholars as the theory affirmed the earlier rejected position of the instinctive-stimulus

response model of the late 1930s, which assumed that the mass media have direct and irresistible effects on their target public. Interestingly, the post-instinctive stimulus response studies on media effects later confirmed that the mass media have an indirect influence on their target audience, which is expressed through a number of mediating factors. McQuail (2005, p. 465) added that: "…the most confusing aspect of research on media effects is the multiplicity and complexity of the phenomena involved [in media influence]." This is why it is relatively difficulty to conduct cause and effect studies in the discipline of communication studies as several factors come into play in order to ensure that the members of the public respond to media messages with the expected stimuli. The presumed effect of the media on their target public is hardly evaluated with empirical evidence. This is because most of the research findings on media effect fail to correctly account for the impact of the intervening variables in society on the activities of the news media. The extraneous variables in media environments have the potential to add or subtract from whatever changes a researcher may have observed on a dependent variable (audience attitude-change), following the effect of the manipulation the independent variables (media messages), in a given communications encounter between the media and their target public.

For example, the prior knowledge and interest that people have toward a product or service, are parts of the intervening variables that could influence the interests of the consumers toward the product or service; much more than the effect of advertisements on the products. This is one of the weaknesses of communications theories. Most research findings in communication studies are yet to be validated, using empirical evidence to authenticate the presumed influence of media messages on their target public. Despite the argument surrounding the modalities for determining media influence, and how the influence is

channelled through a number of mediating factors, the fact remains that the mass media are relevant instruments for determining public opinion on any issue.

The blind spot in research, where most scholars often disagree at the moment, is on media effect; being able to determine when and how a target audience changed its attitude towards the subject of a media message. This argument does not however invalidate the fact that the press has a measure of impact on the choices and decisions of their target audience. Noelle-Neumann (1991, p. 257) affirmed in her studies that: "...public opinion exerts pressure on the government as well as every individual in society. But how this pressure develops and functions is a subject the social research has yet to deal with successfully." Kuhn (2007, p. 256) added:"… whether the reinforcement model of the media is historically valid or not, it should be noted that it still allows for an audience being influenced." Kuhn's position confirmed that newspaper reports have a measure of influence in the moulding of public opinion on topical issues, but the degree of that influence among other factors, provides the basis of the disagreement among scholars on the role of media effect.

Bearing this in mind, the Spiral of Silence Theory still provides the relevant theoretical framework for evaluating the possible effect of the media in the conduct of elections among other variables, like the influence of the social category and the social relation perspective on group behaviour. McQuail (2005, p. 520) argues that the Spiral of Silence Theory was used in German politics, where opinion poll indications were inconsistent with other data concerning public expectations of who would win an election. It was discovered that the candidate who was supposed to have won in the 1965 German national elections, going by public expectations, did not win; while the candidates with the least audience rating prior the media publicity on the pre-election survey result, won in the elections. It

should be noted that the spiral of silence is unconsciously created by the media. This is because as the media set the agenda for public debate over an important issue, and gave prominent attention to the issue it in their subsequent coverage; they are unconsciously in the process creating a spiral of silence over other related important issues which they did report on for public discussions. Folarin (2002, p. 78) took a specific position on this issue, by adding that: "the media, especially television, is responsible for the spiral of silence; television encourages those whose opinions are losing ground to keep silent in order not to be isolated or ridiculed."

Once the radio and television stations, together with the newspapers seem to have taken a similar position in their reports on any issue, the general public tends to assume that such a position must be correct. Of course, such an assumption would not be correct. The media have the potential to influence public decisions, but they also have covert interests to protect in their reports. Noelle Neumann did not fully account for the effect of the extraneous variables in society, which in addition to the media report on the prior election survey, accounted for the victory of the Christian Democrats in the 1965 German elections. According Leighley (2004, p.129):

> An unknown number of issues or problems exist in society and compete for government decision makers' attention. What draws both political elites and the mass public to attend to any one objectively important issue over others is an unusual or dramatic triggering event that uniquely symbolises the critical importance of the problem. When such events are portrayed in the media as news, both the public and elected officials suddenly become aware of the problem, and the latter may choose to address it. In this respect, the mass media determine which issues will be addressed by the government.

The press has the potential to influence the way both the government and the citizens respond to issues of public concern. For instance, media reports and analyses of the results of an election are usually predicated on the views and comments of the internal and the

external observers that monitored the conduct of an election. In the same vein, the mass media provide the platform for the public debates and discussions on the elections. It is such avenues that afford the citizens the opportunity of knowing whether the elections were free and fair based on the views expressed by the general public regarding the activities and conduct of the elections. In most democratic societies, citizens tend to rely more on media reports and editorials on the conduct of elections than the reports gathered from other sources of observations on the events.

Therefore, it can be taken for granted that the knowledge most citizens have about the events that occurred during an election exercise is predicated upon what the media reported about the conduct of the election. Balkin (1999, p. 396) was of the view that: "When we use television to understand politics, we see things in the way that television allows them to be seen; at the same time, television creates new forms of political reality that exist because they are seen on television." In other words, once the press takes a position on any issue that is of public importance, including an election, the public unconsciously gravitates towards the direction of media position on the issue. The majority of the members of the public rely on the media to know about the events that occur daily in society, and they discuss and take decisions on public issues based on the information provided by journalists. During the 2007 Nigerian elections, some media stations in the country neglected to report some of the major electoral irregularities that were later reviewed by the Nigerian Judiciary, probably because of the fear that public knowledge of such incidents could create room for crises among the political parties. Other radio and television stations went to the extent of producing special jingles, which they played throughout the period of the elections, requesting the people to accept the results of the 2007 elections as approved by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), so as to allow Nigeria to make

history for being able to transit from one civilian administration to another. An international media organisation, the *Times* (2010, p. 75) observed this phenomenon among Nigerians:

> Governing party supporters had stuffed ballot boxes, intimidated voters and falsified results to ensure a landslide. His opponents cried foul, but many Nigerians appeared ready to accept the flawed election as the price of the first handover from one civilian president to another since independence in 1960.

Unfortunately, the radio and television jingles used by the media to solicit public support for the elections were not designed to prevent the government from influencing the results of the 2007 elections. It was therefore not surprising that the account of history on that election today is unfavourable.

The effects of media propaganda on the 2007 Nigerian elections played only a fractional role among other factors that encouraged the Nigerian voters to toe the line of peace, and wait for the judiciary to resolve the fraudulent versions of the elections results. Before the 2007 Elections, Nigerians were tired of military dictatorship; consequently they carefully avoided any protest that would attract the military back to power. However, many of the results of the elections earlier approved by the INEC were later reversed by the Nigerian Judiciary; a confirmation that the elections were actually rigged as alleged by both the internal and the external observers that monitored the conduct of the elections. The conduct of an election is the litmus test of a nation's commitment to democracy. Osage, (2008, p. 223) affirmed that:

> Elections are a technical means of ensuring popular participation in government […] It makes government both responsible and responsive to the need of the people because a bad government can be voted out of power during elections. It is the only way to establish majority rule and the legitimacy of government.

Representative Government

The purpose of elections in a democratic system of government is for the citizens to be able to elect a proportionate representative of the people, who would in turn represent the interests of the other citizens in government and in parliament. Representative democracy is an improved version of an indirect-government, where a few people are elected into public office to represent the interests of other citizens in public affairs. In this context, democracy is simply a mechanism that enhances the efficiency of the public decision-making process in modern politics. Nwabueze (1993, p. 67), believed that: "representative government, after all is only resorted to as a substitute for direct democracy because of the impossibility, inconvenience and expenses in a large country in which every question touching upon its government is decided by the people at large." This is why it is important for politicians to always get regular feedback from the people on the effects of government policies on the living standards of the citizens in order to know when it would be necessary for government to re-adjust its policy framework. This would help the government to accommodate the immediate needs of the people, but without compromising its ability to meet the future needs of the citizens. Mazey (1996, p.123) disclosed that in the French context: "that prominent campaign issues, public opinion polls and debates together with the programmes put forward by candidates and their parties usually constitute important indicators of the current socio-political problems, public concerns and competitive policy agendas of the country." This is because the French leaders understood that the sovereignty of the state, upon which the government derived its legitimacy, belongs to the people, and democracy allows the citizens to meet at every interval to elect their leaders. Indeed, this is the beauty of democracy. Gordon (2006, p. 37) agrees that true democracy is people-centred when he stated that: "I frequently feel that other people would be better off if, instead of doing as they wished, they followed my advice; but in a democracy, there is not

much we can do about imposing our view upon the people." This statement does not imply that the public is stupid; it only means that most times the governments find it difficult to differentiate between the honest remarks made by the citizens on a government programme of activities from the distracting comments of political opponents regarding government efforts.

There is nothing wrong in any government accepting public criticisms made in good faith, so long as they are constructive. This is because most of the times, the members of the opposition parties in parliament actually complement the efforts of government by making useful suggestions on better ways of doing government's business in politics. But it is through credible elections that a reliable government that is oriented towards the general public in its policies and operations can emerge. (Dalton 2002, p. 39 cited in Stromback and Johansson 2007), believe that: "voting is the one activity that binds the individual to the political system and legitimises the rest of the democratic process." Unfortunately, some leaders in Africa occupy political positions which they were not elected into by their people, and in order for them to sustain themselves in power; they harass and oppress the more vociferous groups in society that they perceive to be challenging the legitimacy of their governments. With the aid of the government-owned media, such vocal groups are cynically branded as being dissident groups in order to make the members appear as deviants in the estimation of a reasonable general public.

This is because elections that are supposed to be a mere gateway to democracy are yet to be conducted without external supervision in many developing nations. In Africa in particular, if elections are free and fair, people are surprised, hence   Smith (2009, p. 868) observed that the peaceful conduct of Ghana's very close national elections in late 2008 was unusual

in that it did not lead to any sustained questioning of the outcome. In contrast, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe and Kenya each have witnessed a degree of post-election violence in their recent elections. Experience has shown that when candidates rigged their way into government, they laid the foundation for injustice and oppression. In such countries, government can abuse the fundamental human rights of the citizens who are without any possible redress; as the corporate image of the countries concern suffers a loss of indignity in the estimation of other members of the community of nations. The Election Monitoring Group of the Commonwealth (2007, p. 2), maintains in its Report of Nigerian elections that:

> If indeed the Nigerian people are demonstrating disenchantment with the democratic process, this must be a matter of concern to us all. Losing faith in democracy would be a serious set back for Nigeria. It is something this nation- indeed, Africa, the Commonwealth and the entire international community- can ill-afford.

The electoral irregularities that featured in the 2007 Nigerian elections were indeed a replay of the electoral malpractice that characterised the 1964/65 general elections. The 2007 elections actually revealed a naked display of injustice against some of the candidates who contested in the elections. Boutros-Ghali (2000, p. 106) noted that governments, which are responsible and accountable, are likely to be stable and promote peace, and that many internal conflicts stem from the belief, justified or not, that the state does not represent all groups in society, or that it seeks to impose an exclusive ideology. Most of the crisis in the African Continent could have been avoided if proper elections had been conducted in those countries and the citizens had the opportunity to elect the leaders of their choice.

Likewise, things would have probably been different notwithstanding the attitude of some politicians if there were more effective control mechanisms within political parties to check the conduct of the party members against excesses. Most party executives in Nigeria

become daily enmeshed in trying to resolve the intra-party conflicts created by the ruling elite, such that they had no time to attend to other important issues. "Ideally political parties on whose platform the political office holders were elected into office should have been able to bridge the gap in governance and carefully explain the factors (whatever those may be) that have withheld the materialisation of the democratic dividends (Enemaku, 2003, p. 84). In modern politics, party decisions should ideally take precedence over the personal views of party members on public issues. The national executive of the political party on whose platform an incumbent government was elected into power can also provide the policy framework that could assist the government to align its policies and programmes in line with party ideology and beliefs.

Nevertheless, when any government becomes insensitive to constructive criticisms, or is found to be working at cross-purposes with public needs and expectations; it also becomes the responsibility of particular parties to call the government to account. If the government decides to reject the virtues of good reasoning in the management of public affairs, the party members in the parliament (not the members of the opposition parties), should ideally initiate an impeachment process against the executive, and remove the government from office in order to protect the interest of the state. The African National Congress (ANC) removed the former President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, from office on 25 September 2008. This followed Mbeki's anti-party behaviour, coupled with the undue pressure he exerted on the court to prosecute his former deputy, Jacob Zuma, the President of South Africa. The party saw Mbeki's action as a misrepresentation of what ANC believes and stands for. So, Mbeki was removed from office, and this has served as a deterrent to up-and-coming leaders never to take an undue advantage of public office to serve personal needs. What a worthy example and a testimony of commitment to transparent democracy

from South Africa, a country that obtained its freedom from white minority rule in 1994; having earlier obtained its political independence from the British Government in 1934.

It should be noted that it was not difficult for the ANC to remove Mbeki from office because he was elected by the people to serve the general public, and so removing him from office when he has been found to have compromised his oath of office, was also in the interest of the citizens. According to Held (2000, p.18):

> Through the ballot box, citizen-voters are, in principle, able to hold decision-makers to account; and as a result of electoral consent, decision-makers are able to make and pursue law and policy legitimately for their constituents, ultimately the people, in a fixed, territorially-based community.

Interestingly, it is Nigeria that played a major role in the decolonisation process of South Africa, but the country is yet to embrace the fact that the essence of democracy is embedded in the application of the rule of law, notwithstanding whose interest is affected when the government is promoting equity and justice in the interest of peace and development in society.

Political Communication Model

The three-lines of communication system: the upward, the downward and the horizontal channels of communication, which explain the movements and direction of information signals within an organisation, can also help Nigerian journalists to understand the flow of information between the government and its citizens. Under the downward communication system, the press is expected to give wide publicity to government programmes of activities, which would enable the public to appreciate the effort the government is making towards ensuring the growth and development of society. The State and National

Assembly; government ministries; inter-governmental activities; and, foreign desk are among the sources of the downward communication system.

Secondly, information is disseminated to people of equal or related status in an organisation, using the channel of the horizontal communication system. Since the three arms of government have comparable status constitutionally, Nigerian journalists can use this model to assess how news and information circulate among the three arms of government. It is important to understand that information within government is an in-house matter; media organisations normally should not have access to information within government, except by the approval of an authorised government official. In fact, there are sets of items of information in government that are immune to public access. Even if a journalist stumbles across such information, so long as the story is contained in a classified government document, or branded as an Official Secret Act; it will be unlawful for any editor to publish the story. This might be one of the reasons why Nigerian journalists are currently demanding a Freedom of Information Act that would enable them gain access to public documents and publish any story, so long as such publication does not infringe upon the rights of the state or those of the citizens.

Journalists have the right notwithstanding, to investigate cases of the allegations of misconduct committed by public officials. The Nigerian weekly magazines have a reputation for conducting investigative journalism in Nigeria, and they have used this brand of journalism to contribute toward the ongoing anti-corruption crusade in the country. Since 1999 to date, two speakers of the House of Representatives: Alhaji Ibrahim Salisu Buhari and Mrs. Patricia Olubunmi Etteh, together with three Senate Presidents of the Federal Republic of Nigeria: Evans Enwerem, Chuba Okadigbo and Adolphus Wabara,

have had their tenures truncated, following their alleged involvement in cases ranging from the misuse of office to gross misconduct. It was the Nigerian journalists who unveiled these cases of misconduct. (Oboh, 2008:10).

The upward communication system is very important as it provides a platform for the media to report on the effects of government policies on the living standards of the citizens. This process enables the government to know what the people feel about its policies and programmes. Unfortunately, the press in its daily coverage of events usually neglects the views of the rural population on public issues, probably because most rural people do not have the profile of those celebrities, who usually attract the attention of the media. This might be the reason why the Nigerian Government finds it difficult to know the needs of the rural population since the people have no platform through which they can articulate and express their views on the problems affecting their communities. Most of the members of the state and national assembly, who would have been able to provide the government with information on the needs of their people, do not have the adequate and correct information on the people whom they claim to represent. Some of the members of the Nigerian parliaments do not have functional offices in their wards where they are supposed to meet and brief their people on the government's programme of activities. The government therefore has no adequate information on the rural population that would enable it to plan for both the immediate and remote needs of the people in the community.

Therefore, there is a need for the media to consciously upgrade the status of community reporting in Nigeria. It is important to mention that in the upward communication system, the citizens provide information for the media in the capacity of news sources, while the government becomes the recipient. Nevertheless, very few Nigerian journalists actually

subscribe to this sequence when reporting on events in the rural areas. Many journalists still sometimes go to urban areas to interview celebrities regarding an event that happened in a rural setting, neglecting the rural people altogether. This is unfortunate, given that the people in the rural area where the incident occurred would probably be able to provide more information on such issues. When the Federal Government decides to set up a committee to investigate rural community crises in the country, the conflict resolution committee usually excludes the inhabitants of the areas where the crisis occurred. This is because of the perception that most rural dwellers are uneducated and therefore cannot make any meaningful contribution on important public issues. This attitude of neglecting the rural population could explain why most ethnic conflicts in Nigerian politics remain unresolved

In a participatory democracy, everyone is important. The fact that most Nigerian rural dwellers are not educated does not necessarily mean that they cannot make useful suggestions that could transform their own environments. The news media should therefore create an awareness of how the government can effectively use the three lines of communication model to encourage public participation in government. Iredia (2008, p. 23) argued this point in his study: "The best strategy to promote governance through accountability is for the media to set the agenda for the nation. The best way to set an agenda is to create a platform for the exchange of ideas between the people and the government."

However, there should be a division of labour between the electronic and the print media when reporting events during elections. While reporting electoral events, the radio and television stations should focus on the conduct of elections in the sequence in which electoral events occur, while the print media should investigate and interpret the issues

reported earlier by the electronic media. This method would enhance the objectivity of media reports of events regarding the conduct of the elections. Both the print and the electronic media should ensure that they give equal opportunity to all the registered political parties, to educate the electorate on their party programmes and manifestoes, but without compromising the integrity and objectivity of the media. The Italian Media once adopted an approach where the print and electronic media focused on the different segments in an election. Ponter (1987: 147) reveals that:

> Television and radio have a first-person character: in speeches, commercials, and even news reporting, the candidates and party leaders present themselves directly to the voters. By contrast, even the most objective kind of print journalism, other than speech texts, is a second-person account and is therefore to some extent commentary. In the case of Italian print journalism, commentary and evaluation are constant major factors; political writers are practically drama critics.

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Conclusion

The birth of Nigeria as a nation-state was successful because the Nigerian nationalists were determined to ensure that the nation would become an independent state and a voice on the African Continent. However, scarcely had the battle over colonialism been won by the elite in 1960, than the negative effects of ethnicity; tribalism; nepotism and religious bigotry crept into the nation's politics and destroyed the unity that existed among Nigerian leaders. It was therefore not surprising when the military intervened and truncated the nation's initial democratic effort in January 1966. The degree of governmental involvement in the electoral malpractice that characterised the 1964/65 elections, coupled with the failure of the judiciary to deliver justice to the claims and objections that emanated from the conduct of the elections, brought about unprecedented violence in many parts of the country, especially in the then Western region until the collapse of the First Republic.

Unfortunately, there has not been any substantial improvement in the conduct of elections in Nigeria since then.

The Nigerian Judiciary of the 21ˢᵗ Century has rekindled public confidence in the electoral process. However, there is no relationship for now between the hope of the Nigeria of yesterday and the future of today's democracy. This is why it has becomes necessary that the Federal Government reappraise its commitment towards the conduct of elections in the country as many other African nations look up to Nigeria to play a significant role in the success of democracy in the continent. As a part of the solutions to the problem of elections, this paper recommends that all the registered political parties in Nigeria should form an Inter-Party Central Committee (IPCC), made up of the members of the National Executives of the registered political parties; media gurus and elder statesmen as members. The aim of this proposed committee among other functions will be to evolve a code of practice that would guide the conduct of politicians during the elections. The proposed committee would play an advisory role to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) on some of the ways to ensure the successful conduct of free and fair elections in the country. Therefore, while the INEC in the subsequent elections is looking at the constitutional requirements an aspirant should have to contest for an election, the IPCC will be looking at the moral antecedents of an aspirant based on his or her past contributions to society.

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