

Political Communications: Press and Politics in Nigeria's Second Republic

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Abstract

This paper examines mass media bias in Nigerian political communications. It argues that ownership of the mass media in Nigeria tends to determine how they are used for political communications in the country. Other factors, such as ethnicity, religion, literacy, language of communication, legal limitations, political and socio-economic conditions, are also considered. The paper maintains, however, that the fact of ownership is not only the key which determines how the mass media are used for moulding the citizen's perception of political reality in the country, but that it is also a more precise means of understanding and investigating the role of the press in political stability or instability, national integration or disintegration. It concludes that as Nigeria approaches a third attempt at democratic rule in socio-economic conditions which are less propitious than in the past, there is a need for the Nigerian mass media to operate in a way which contributes to national integration. It suggests the need to restructure the media ownership pattern and to establish a Nigerian Media Advisory Council.

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Communications Politiques: Presse et Politique au cours du mandat de la Deuxieme République Nigerienne

Résumé

Cette dissertation passe en revue les préjugés des masses médias dans les communications politiques nigériennes. L'exposé argumente que les propriétaires des masses médias au Nigéria ont tendance à déterminer leur utilisation pour les communications politiques dans le pays. D'autres facteurs tels que l'ethnicité, la religion, l'alphabétisation, le langage de la communication, les limitations légales, les facteurs politiques et socio-économiques sont également analysés. L'exposé a cependant réaffirmé que le fait de possession est non seulement l'élément clé qui détermine la façon dont les masses médias sont utilisés pour encadrer la perception des citoyens des réalités politiques dans le pays, mais aussi que c'était un moyen précis de comprendre et enquêter sur le rôle de la presse dans la stabilité ou l'instabilité politique, l'intégration ou la désintégration nationale.

L'exposé conclut qu'au moment où le Nigéria s'approche de la troisième tentative vers un régime démocratique dans des conditions socio-économiques qui sont moins propices que dans le passé, il y a nécessité que les masses médias nigériens travaillent d'une manière qui contribue à une intégration nationale. Il met en exergue le besoin de réviser les conditions de propriété des masses médias et d'établir Un Conseil Consultatif Nigérien des Masses Médias.

Introduction: Theoretical Issues and Conceptual Clarifications

The problem of examining the role of the mass media in political communications and their effects on national issues, election campaigns in particular, is not confined to Nigeria. Anywhere in the world, the press has always been involved in politics, formation of public opinion, perception of images of candidates for political offices, the definition of social reality and social norms, the education, information, enlightenment and entertainment of the public, as well as the presentation and clarification of issues, values, goals and changes in culture and society. 'Some kinds of communication on some kinds of issues, brought to the attention of some kinds of people under some kinds of conditions have some kinds of effects' (Berelson, 1948).

Scholars have been concerned for centuries with the possible influence of the mass media of communication on the formation of public opinion and attitudes, but there have been divergent and diametrically opposed views on the subject. The result of many disputes about the role of the press is, arguably, what the French call a 'dialogue of the deaf', where nobody hears the other side's argument. 'The entire study of mass communication is based on the premise, that there are effects from the media, yet it seems to be the issue on which there is least certainty and least agreement' (McQuail, 1983).

Aristotle and Plato (Thomson, 1964), for instance, acknowledged the immense power of propaganda carried out in the face-to-face setting during their days. Some writers believe that the media are very powerful, while others see the powers of the press as very limited. For example, politicians and journalists are agreed that the role of the media is crucial, though they disagree about how effectively it is being played. Further tribute to this role is paid by the various social scientists who have made research into mass media and political communications a growth point in academic industry. Yet clear and specific descriptions, definitions and analyses of what the mass media actually contribute, or ought to contribute, to the political communication process are still inconclusive. In the words of C.R. Wright (1960:4)

It is customary to speak of 'the influence of the press' in global terms, as if it were a single, indivisible pressure at work within society, but closer examination reveals that newspapers are actually multi-functional institutions which make their presence felt in a variety of ways.

Political Importance of the Mass Media

Harold Lasswell (1969) itemizes three functions performed by the mass media, namely, surveillance of the world to report on-going events, interpretation of the meaning of events, and socialization of individuals into their cultural settings. Another attribute of the media is the deliberate manipulation of the political process. The manner in which these functions are performed, it is argued, affects

the lives of individuals, groups, and social organizations, as well as the course of domestic and international politics.

In the same vein, Lucian Pye (1963) points out that there is a 'peculiarly intimate relationship between the political process and the communication process.' Karl Deutsch (1966) also suggests that a study of the nerves of the body politic – its decision-making processes – gives insight into the performance of its bones and muscles: the exercise of power. In a special version of the 'everything in politics is communication' argument, Almond (1960) has noted: All of the functions performed in the political system – political socialization and recruitment, interest articulation, interest aggregation, *political communication* [my emphasis], rule-making, rule-application and rule-adjudication – are performed by means of communication.

In relation to developing societies, the communication functions of the mass media are even more crucial (Sommerland, 1966; Mazrui, 1971; Mowlana, 1971). A developing society is in a more or less constant condition of crisis, faced with the possibility of disunity, with the need to mobilize its people for a war on poverty, disease, hunger, indiscipline, economic sabotage, smuggling, armed robbery, hooliganism, vandalism, brigandage, social injustice, and crippling attitudes and traditions. It is also faced with the need to ensure that its few resources – human, physical, natural and material – are harnessed for achieving the goals of political stability, rapid industrialization, rural development, freedom of the individual, greater economic equality, democratic political participation, and for solutions of other problems. The press in developing countries serves a multiplicity of purposes. It is an instrument of political, social, cultural and physical communication, and of economic progress. It is a medium of news and a means of establishing mutual understanding or misunderstanding.

The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1979, recognizes the crucial role the press could play, not only in political communications but also in national integration and development: 'The press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this chapter and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people (Nigeria, 1979)

Moreover, retired General Olusegun Obasanjo, a former Head of State, whose regime handed over power to the civilians in the Second Republic, specifically mentioned press' responsibility in political transition when he said, in a speech lifting the ban on partisan politics in 1978:

The coming months would pose testing challenges not only to the participants in the ensuing political activities, but also to the mass media who have the *responsibility* [my emphasis] of interpreting and informing the public of the issues, as well as correctly conveying the public mood to those vying for political leadership (Bolaji, 1980).

In the same vein, the first elected executive president, Alhaji Shehu Shagari, acknowledged the press' responsibility while speaking on media and national integration. He said:

As members of the Fourth Estate of the Realm, you have sacred *responsibilities* to this nation. On your shoulders lies the duty of fostering national cohesion and engendering a sense of belonging in our people. . . The press is in a very unique position in that it possesses an enormous power that can either destroy or build. The power is deadly as well as redeeming . . . Journalists in Nigeria have over the years demonstrated these two-pronged powers of the press (Nigeria, 1980).

From colonial era to independence period, to military interregnum, the Nigerian press has been overtly partisan. Nearly all papers in Nigeria started in association with political parties.

Nigerian Political Communications in Historical Perspective

Political Communications in Colonial Nigeria

Media ownership in colonial Nigeria was dominated by missionaries, colonial administrators, nationalists, political parties, politicians and private foreign organizations. During the colonial period, the press served as a medium of sustained public debate and political protest, an uncompromising advocate of administrative and political reforms, and a seething critic of the excesses of the colonial order. By its political activities, the press not only stimulated the emergence of nationalist movements but also played a prominent role in the constitutional development of modern Nigeria. During the period of nationalism, the press served as political recruiters and mobilizers. First, the party papers served as vehicles for changing political consciousness, and through them the ideas of nationalism were propagated. Secondly, the press generally recruited people to political movements. Thirdly, they contributed to party organization. Fourthly, the press encouraged the penetration of political activities into the provinces. In fact, the press was among the major weapons used by the nationalist leadership to gain and consolidate political power and governmental control (Omu, 1968; Duyile, 1987).

In the campaigns for the 1953 elections, newspapers were identified as falling into three groups: the Pro-NNDP, exemplified by the *Record*; anti-NNDP, exemplified by the *Advocate*. The *Tribune* was the campaign forum for the Action Group, while the NCNC had the *Pilot*.

In the post-independence era, the media were also employed for political communication. They initiated and sustained public debate on a wide range of issues, including 'the national census', 'creation of states', 'revenue allocation', 'national reconstruction, reconciliation and rehabilitation', 'International Monetary Fund (IMF) debate', 'green revolution', 'ethical revolution', 'operation feed the nation' and 'war against indiscipline'.

Media and Political Communications in Nigeria's First Republic

There were mixed party and non-party media, government-owned and controlled media, political-party newspapers and the press of private concerns, during the first republic, 1960-1966. The impact of ownership on these was largely reflected in their coverage of national issues of paramount importance, such as the census, election campaigns, regional crises, ethnic and group interests, among many others. The leading political party newspapers were not only locked in vicious combat but also all the media provided remarkable examples of over-zealous, irresponsible partisanship and recklessness. The seeds of mutual distrust, running battles and unending confrontations between regional media and the federal media, on the one hand, and between different regional media and political party newspapers, on the other hand, all of which were sown during the colonial, independence and first republic periods, are still germinating.

The census crisis was of crucial importance in the sequence of political crises that engulfed the First Republic. It sparked a bitter inter-ethnic feud and polarized the political leadership along ethno-regional front lines. Furthermore, it not only set the stage for the controversial 1964 federal elections and the attendant constitutional stalemate but also contributed to the violent collapse of the First Republic. The Northern region's government paper, the *Citizen*, described the Ibos as being 'industrious, migratory . . . impenetrably united tribesmen', adding that, for the census, they flew to the East, inflated the population there, and returned smiling to continue to thrive affluently in the North. One cartoon in the paper portrayed Ibos as pidgin-speaking cannibals (21.3.64).

The Eastern regional government-owned paper, the *Nigerian Outlook*, carried stereotypes of the North, particularly in the Editor-in-Chief's 'Saturday Catechism.' He spoke of the NPC leaders' 'childishness and amateurishness' by which they showed 'they are not seasoned rulers of the North.' He added: 'The North cannot afford a break-up of the Republic. They have nothing up there to eat. They have little education. Their art of government is primitive. They have no access to the sea' (18.3.64).

The *Outlook* inflated the political strength of the Ibos when it spoke of the Ibos as being forced to defend themselves with stunning effectiveness against the nomadic herdsmen of the NPC.

Political Communications Under the Military

It was the general belief of the Nigerian military regimes that unrestricted circulation of newspapers could constitute a danger to their government, hence they promulgated all kinds of decrees to gag the press. These decrees, however, did not stop the press from commenting on many of the wrongdoings under the military. The Gowon era provides a good example of open confrontation between the press and military rulers, and this eventually contributed to the fall of Gowon in 1975. In the words of Panter-Brick (1970: 8): 'The press played a vital role in preparing the ground for removing Gowon's government, through reporting

views of the government's opposers and showing its own dissatisfaction. This was especially true of the *New Nigerian* (before its nationalization by the federal government) in spite of the fact that it was owned by governments of six northern states.'

A manifestation of the press-government relationship under Gowon can be depicted through selected Nigerian newspaper headlines of the period, such as the following:

ADEBAYO BANS MORNING STAR AND IMOLEOWURO (*Daily Times*, 1, 1967)

REPORTERS/CAMERAMEN ORDERED OUT OF GOWON'S PLANE (*Morning Post*, 13 August 1969)

POLICE SWOOP ON TIMES OFFICE (*New Nigerian* and *Nigerian Observer*, 11 July 1969)

One of the greatest problems General Ironsi had was that of communication, and this plagued him throughout his tenure of office. Gowon was later to have the same problem of communication when the press started a series of attacks on his lieutenants on questions of public morality, probity and rectitude. Gowon's nine years in office were later to be described as nine years of misrule and failure (Elaigwu, 1986).

The first major step taken by the Muhammed/Obasanjo regime regarding the Nigerian press and political communications was the acquisition of 60 percent of the shares in the *Daily Times* and the total takeover (ownership) of the *New Nigerian* by 31 August, 1975. The regime also promulgated a decree to gag the press. Known as Public Officers Protection Against False Accusations Decree Number 11 of 1976, it took retroactive effect from 29 July, 1975. The first negative move of the Buhari regime on the Nigerian press and political communications was the promulgation of the notorious and obnoxious Decree Number 4 of 1984, also known as Public Officers Protection Against False Accusation. Although the Babangida regime abrogated Decree No. 4, the honeymoon between the press and the regime appears to have come to an end with the introduction of a number of measures, including the promulgation of decrees to gag the press.

The relations between the press and the Babangida regime deteriorated over several issues: the government's economic policies, the treatment of politicians of the second republic, many of whom were appointed to big positions in the government; government decisions on religious issues, especially those that affect Christians and Muslims; government's handling of students' crisis and demonstrations with government's sacking of ministers and state governors which had some ethnic, tribal and religious undertones; the murder of Dele Giwa by a parcel bomb when he was Editor-in-Chief of *Newswatch* magazine, and the proscription of *Newswatch* itself for six months for its detailed expose on the Cookey Political Bureau report.

The Babangida regime also promulgated many decrees to curb political communication and gag the press. Despite the administration's euphoria and attempts to wear a human face, journalists were imprisoned, newspapers/magazines were proscribed, university teachers were sacked, social critics were arrested and jailed, students were massacred and a press council was established.

Press and Politics in Nigeria's Second Republic

The transition programmes which culminated in the advent of Nigeria's Second Republic involved public discussions highlighted by the Nigerian press. Apart from the military leaders' acknowledgement of mass media responsibility for interpreting and informing the electorate of the issues, the 1979 Constitution also required special obligations from the press on Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of state policy. In fact, the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) recognized the role of the press in election campaign communication when it decided in its guidelines for party registration that whatever amount spent by registered political parties on political communications through the mass media would be one of the factors to be taken into consideration for the purpose of determining election expenses.

If the quantity of newspapers and the fearlessness of their editorial opinions and reportage are taken as measures of the level of political awareness and consciousness prevailing in a country at any given period, then the growth of the newspaper industry in Nigeria between 1979 and 1983, the period of the Second Republic, could correctly be said to represent a high level of political participation and interest in a democracy. Every political pressure group established its own newspaper to put its message across the political spectrum and seek entry and recognition in the political decision-making process. With the exception of the well edited broadsheet *Weekly Democrat*, that made its debut in January 1984 and then quickly disappeared, the following newspapers represented one form of political interest group or another: *National Concord*, *Satellite*, *Guardian*, *Nigerian Call*, *Eagle*, *Okigwe Voice*, *Trumpet*, *Daily Nation*, *Echo*, *Daily News*, *Record*, *Stamp*, *Advocate*, *Premier*, *Hope*, *Graphic*, *Sun*, and *People's News*.

The Federal and State Government Media

During the Second Republic, the Federal Government owned and controlled the *Daily Times*, the *New Nigerian*, the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria, and the Nigerian Television Authority. All the state government media were owned and controlled by the respective state military governments, except the Sketch Press Limited, which was owned and controlled by the governments of Oyo, Ogun and Ondo States. The *Standard*, the *Star*, and the *Statesman* were owned by states controlled by the Nigerian People's Party (NPP); the *Observer* was owned by the Bendel State, controlled by the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN); and

the *Herald* was owned by the Kwara State, controlled by the National Party of Nigeria (NPN). But, after the 1983 elections, the *Herald* was owned by the Kwara State controlled by the UPN, while the *Star* was owned by the Anambra State controlled by the NPN.

Political Party Newspapers

In addition to the existing political party newspapers, such as the *Tribune* owned by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the presidential candidate of the Unity Party of Nigeria, there were Waziri Ibrahim's *The Nationalist*, Augustus Akinloye's *Sunday Advocate*, Kingsley Mbadiwe's *The Eagle*, Alex Ekweme's *The Trumpet*, Victor Akan's *The Call*, Jim Nwobodo's *Satellite*, Nwakanma Okoro's *The Nation*, and Anthony Enahoro's *The Sun*, to mention just a few. The *National Concord*, which is still being published, was founded by Chief M.K.O. Abiola in 1980 to support the policies of the NPN. The paper's philosophy, however, changed when its owner, Chief Abiola, quit politics.

The Independent Press

The *Punch* was the only newspaper that could be described as 'independent' during the Second Republic, since its owner and publisher, Chief Olu Aboderin, was with no known political affiliation then. He was, however, known to be close to the Chief Obafemi Awolowo, leader of the UPN. Strictly, the so-called 'independent' newspapers were not so independent. They subjected their readers to all kinds of publicity about the politics, ideology and culture of their owners or of those who were close to them.

There were other newspapers founded during the tail-end of the Second Republic and after the demise of that Republic. They included the *Guardian* of Alex Ibru, the *Lagos News* of Lateef Jakande, the *Vanguard* of Sam Amuka-Pemu, the *Democrat* of Alhaji Ahmed and other owners, the *Mail* of Dr. Clarkson Majomi, the *Patriot* of Amos Onanuga, the *Reporter* of retired Major-General Shehu Musa Yar'adua, and the *Republic* of Chief Williams Olufemi Ajayi.

Nigerian Mass Media, Political Communications and the General Elections Campaigns for the Second Republic

Two phases of the campaigns that led to the general elections in the Second Republic can be identified. The first phase was between 1978 and 1979 when the mass media were under the military and the 1979 elections were conducted with the military playing a supervisory role. The second phase was between 1982 and 1983 when the mass media were owned by governments controlled by political parties of the Second Republic. In the first phase, there were other factors, in addition to the ownership and control factors, that contributed to the press' bias

in the coverage of election campaigns, while in the second phase ownership was the predominant factor that dictated the direction of news coverage. For instance, the way the state newspapers, radio and television stations paid attention to the 1979 electioneering campaigns showed that greater attention was given to political parties strongest in the locations of those media.

Given the amount of coverage received by the five registered political parties, their performance in the various elections and the consequent results of the 1979 general elections, there is evidence to suggest a positive correlation between election campaign coverage and election performance of the parties and their candidates. For instance, the NPN, which had the highest nationwide mass media coverage, came first in the 1979 elections. The UPN, which had the second highest media coverage, came second. Dr. Azikwe and his NPP came third, both in the nationwide mass media coverage and in the presidential elections. But Dr. Azikwe took the first position in Imo and Anambra, where the *Daily Star*, which gave him the best coverage, is most widely read. Other presidential candidates – Awolowo and Shagari – also came first in coverage and elections in their catchment areas, namely the West and the North.

Malam Aminu Kano, who was given the fourth best nationwide newspaper coverage, also took fourth place in the presidential election. The same is true of Alhaji Ibrahim Waziri, who came last both in newspaper coverage and in the presidential elections.

By October 1979, when the politicians who won the elections of the Second Republic were sworn in, ruling political parties at the Federal and State levels took over the ownership and control of the print and electronic media under their jurisdictions. This situation helped in the intensification of old ethnic antagonisms and the atmosphere of political communication seethed with bitter rivalry and enmity. The press became completely immersed in the vortex of partisan politics and was in no position to prepare the people for the challenges of the new presidential system of government.

The press openly supported one political party against another, and fuelled embers of tribalism, sectionalism, and ethnic chauvinism, all of which culminated in fragmentation and disintegration that again threatened the unity and stability of the Nigerian state. The media were unable to develop the required ethos of professionalism, impartiality, responsibility, objectivity, and balance in reporting political events, national issues, and activities. The partisan political colouration of the media incapacitated and prevented them from performing their functions of educating, informing and entertaining the public. The veracity of the media and the credibility of their practitioners became questionable. This was one of the factors that contributed to the fall of the Second Republic in December 1983.

By the time the 1983 election campaigns began, it was difficult to distinguish between the ruling political parties and the mass media under them. Each political party made use of its own press; personalities were attacked while the real campaign issues and principles were ignored. There were allegations that many

media practitioners during the period could be bought. Some were said to have been on the secret payroll of politicians, some analysed issues and events from the point of view of their political mentors, some reported press conferences they never attended, while others carried releases that were never issued. Thus campaigns for elections, which in Nigeria, as elsewhere, are crucial to national survival and political stability, caused serious problems in Nigeria's Second Republic such as internal rioting, arson, assassination, vandalism, hooliganism, and exacerbated ethnic distrust and antagonism.

The consequences of all these were disastrous for the nation. Nigeria again began to manifest the drift and hopelessness which preceded the collapse of the First Republic. The signs were obvious and ominous: intense and violent political rivalry, unguarded and inflammatory public statements, deliberate destruction of public and private properties. Eventually, the military intervened again.

Ethnic and Religious Factors of Press Bias

Other factors that can explain press bias in Nigerian political communications, in addition to ownership and control, are ethnicity and religion. Many Nigerian rulers are aware of the damage these factors could do to the political existence of the nation, and have often warned people to guard against the menace of ethnicity and religion.

Writing on the 1979 elections, Labanji Bolaji (1980) observed that, just as the voting trend in the elections took on a 'strong ethnic colouration', much of the country's press reflected the same pigmentation in their reports and comments.

Religious affiliation has also been a very serious problem for communication and politics in Nigeria. Issues that affect Muslims – the Shariah, the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), the holy pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina (Haji), and the question of Muslim rights in the Constitution – are often treated with levity, derision and contempt by the media, most of which were dominated by Christians. In the same vein, those Nigerian media which have Muslims on their editorial boards retaliate by being critical of anything Christian. Religious crises were becoming so rampant in the country that the Federal Government had to set up a Religious Advisory Council.

Nigeria's Muslims constitute the largest Muslim community in sub-Saharan Africa. In Nigeria itself, in many of the 21 states, Muslims are in a majority.

Considered from the perspective of the Muslims, the situation in Nigeria probably looks something like this. Although they are in a majority, the country since independence has been governed by its rulers, Muslims as well as non-Muslim and its intellectual and business elite, as if it were a non-Muslim country. The symbols and trappings of state, the style of diplomacy, the direction of foreign policy, the political, legal, economic and education systems, the structures of the working week, are all seen to be based on a western, secular model. At these and other levels, Muslims observe a clear continuity between the old colonial state

and the 'new' Nigeria in which they, the largest group in the country, are supposed to participate actively and do so without attempting to change or restructure it along Islamic lines.

Problems of Freedom and Legal Limitations

The Nigerian mass media and its practitioners are also confronted with the problem of freedom, restrictive regulations, legal limitations, decrees, and a host of other ways of gagging the media.

From the colonial era to the independence period, military interregna and successive civilian republics, the Nigerian political system has employed various measures to curb the political communication activities of the media. These include subsidies to favourite publishers, favouritism in the allocation of tightly controlled paper stocks and newsprint, manipulation of access to news, limitation to what may be published or broadcast, threats of incarceration and proscription, the frequent use of treason and sedition laws to control media output, the shielding of sensitive government proceedings, and the protection of what are regarded as individual reputations and privacy.

About 25 such enactments have been identified which severely constrain communication in Nigerian politics. For instance, there are sedition laws, an Official Secrets Act, the Criminal Codes, Decrees 2, 4, and 11, and laws of obscenity, defamation and other extra-legal and non-legal laws restrictive to media freedom.

In Nigeria, cases of media practitioners' harassment and incarceration include: Horatio Jackson of the *Weekly Record*, jailed for sedition for his article 'There is no Justice in Nigeria'; J.B. Davies, the controversial columnist of the *Times of Nigeria*, and Herbert Macaulay, who were members of the 1913 Delegation to London, protesting against the Land Acquisition Ordinance and other objectionable legislation; Tai Solarin, for his article 'The Beginning of the End'; and the proscription of *Newswatch* magazine by the Babangida military regime. Others are Minere Amakiri, chief correspondent of the *Nigerian Observer*, who was stripped, beaten up and his head shaved because of a story on the teachers' strike published on a military governor's (Diete-Spiff's) 31st birthday in Rivers State during the Gowon military regime; the imprisonment of Mr. Thompson and Nduka Irabor of *The Guardian* for one year under Decree 4 during the Buhari military regime; the case of Segun Sowemimo, a journalist whose tragic death inspired the title of Wole Soyinka's prison notes, *The Man Died*; and the mysterious and sudden death of Dele Giwa through a letter-bomb during the Babangida military regime.

Literacy and Linguistic Barriers in Political Communications

Literacy and linguistic barriers affect Nigerian political communications. The inability to read English alienates the majority of the Nigerian people from the

newspaper press, especially the rural dwellers. In Nigeria in 1985, 58 percent of men and 67 percent of women were illiterate. These factors affect the circulation of newspapers and audience-reach of the electronic media. Illiteracy is a huge problem militating against communication and politics in Nigeria.

Moreover, most of the mass media carry out their educative and informative functions through the English language, which is the official language of communication, government, business and commerce in Nigeria. The three Nigerian languages officially recognized – Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba – are still being developed for political communication by the media. The questions, then, are: How many can read, write and understand English to be able to appreciate the media's role in communications and politics? How many Nigerian languages can be used for information dissemination?

The actual number of languages that exist in Nigeria is uncertain. Some estimates put the number at 178; some believe that there are as many languages as there are ethnic groups in Nigeria – 250; and others argue that there may be as many as 300 languages (Hansford et al., 1976). Despite the disagreement between various estimates, it is evident that linguistic pluralism is a Nigerian reality that is presenting a very serious challenge to the cultivation of national unity through the media.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that the political affiliation of media ownership determined, to a large extent, the editorial direction of the Nigerian mass media in their coverage of political parties and the campaigns that led to the 1983 general elections, the last phase of Nigeria's Second Republic. From the sequence of news, total coverage, relative percentage, quality and quantity of news, relative closeness to peak hours, actual utilization, headline casting, to frequency of coverage in the party programmes and campaigns, respective political parties and/or governments which owned the media during the elections were favoured. This resulted in many problems, including the production of 'biased' election stories, the prevention of the media from performing properly and in a neutral manner the functions of informing and educating the electorate on the elections, as well as hampering of the media from upholding their professional, journalistic ethics of impartiality and balance.

Whereas a democratic society largely relies on the mass communication network to inform the electorate adequately and on equal terms about the programmes and policies of different political parties and office contenders, Blumler (1983, 1979) regards election campaigns as processes that live or die; gather momentum or falter, via the heavy and insistent streams of messages that are prepared for delivery to all quarters of the body politic. As he puts it: 'It is through campaign communication that impulses to participate are energized, issues are defined, and choices for voting decisions are conveyed.' In the same

vein, John Carey (1976) argues that: 'An election campaign exists in the public consciousness largely the way it exists in mass media presentation of campaign events.'

The history of Nigerian political communications, particularly during the electioneering campaigns, has shown that the pattern of media ownership and behaviour has remained the same since the country's independence 30 years ago.

As Nigeria approaches a third attempt at democratic rule in socioeconomic conditions which are less propitious than on past occasions, it will be important for the Nigerian press to operate in a way which contributes to political stability and national integration rather than undermines attempts at national unity and federal survival. We suggest that if the Nigerian press behaves more responsibly and tries to understand and appreciate the history, politics, economy, cultures and contradictions of Nigerian society, and strives hard to harmonize these diversities in a positive manner, unity and stability may be achieved.

Whatever the pattern of media ownership, the Nigerian media practitioners should strive to maintain the continued existence of Nigeria as a federation in the way they cover events, issues and activities of politicians in Nigerian political communications in 1992 and beyond.

There is a need to regulate media practice in Nigerian political communications by establishing a Communication Media Advisory Council as an arm of the National Electoral Commission or a National Communication Commission whose responsibility will be to monitor press performance in political communications and set the media agenda for the coverage of national issues.

There is also a need to reorganize the structure of mass media ownership and control in Nigeria with a view to ensuring private ownership of electronic media and diffusion and to regulate against monopoly in order to prevent the misuse of the media by a few rich, powerful, individual owners or groups of Nigerians or governments.

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