



**THE SAME DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE MEDIA AND  
POLITICIANS HAS IMPLICATION FOR NIGERIAN  
ELECTIONS**

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this Inaugural lecture to God for HIS Mercy, Grace and Faithfulness to me and my family.

## **Protocol**

The President

The Vice-Chancellor

Deputy-Vice Chancellor

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The Ag. University Librarian

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Members of the Fourth Estate of the Realm

Ladies and Gentlemen

## **NIGERIAN ETHNIC CONFIGURATION**

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic society comprising 250 ethnic nationalities that speak over 500 languages. The southern parts of the country seem to have made more progress in the educational sector than the northern parts of Nigeria. By 1960 when Nigeria obtained its political independence, the Northern Region accounted for just 10% of primary school enrolment in the country and of over 1000 students at the University of Ibadan, just over 50 students were northerners. The north became uncomfortable with the proposed alliance between Igbos and Yorubas; and threatened to secede from Nigeria unless it was given half of the seats in independence parliaments (Siollum, 2009, Akinola, 2017). The south granted the concession and gave the north more seats in parliaments than the two Southern Regions put together, which meant that no government decision affecting Nigeria can be made without the consent of the Northern Region. The ability of the north to negotiate for more seats in parliaments to protect its future implied that the region was not backward in thoughts and imaginations despite having fewer numbers of educated citizens when compared to the Southern Region of Nigeria. The politicians in the south have belatedly realized that the politicians in the north were not backward as they had thought and that the lopsided parliaments approved before independence meant that the northern leaders will control the Nigerian parliaments in each administration in Nigeria (Siollum, 2009).

Surprisingly, the 1963 Census revealed that the population of the southern region was greater than that of the Northern Region. Each region was allegedly assumed to have inflated its census result, and yet census was used as the major element for determining the share of seats of each region in the parliament. Following the argument on the outcome of the 1963 Census, the Prime Minister, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, ordered verification of the results after which an additional 8.5 million people were FOUND in the north, which made the population of the north 31 million people while Nigeria was 56 million. The population of the north by that figure was then higher than the population of many African countries. The results of the 1963 census caused a rift between the north and south in the country (Siollum, 2009), and consequently introduced the north-south dichotomy into Nigerian politics.

It was towards addressing the problem of ethnic minority rights that the British government set up the Sir Henry Willink Commission in 1957 to investigate the complaints on minority rights. The Nigerian nationalists were not prepared to accept any concession which allows the British government to implement the recommendations of the commission and delay Nigeria's independence beyond October 1960 (Oboh, 2020, p.468). Unfortunately, ethnicity has become a major source of conflict in Nigeria. A section of the Western and the Eastern Regions has intermittently threatened to secede from Nigeria unless the federal government restructures the political economy of the country. The threat to secede from Nigeria began with the Northern Region; and it has become a model in Nigerian politics, which citizens use to secure the attention of the federal government on issues having exhausted other legitimate processes to make the government see the need to address urgent national issues as evident in the threats by the Indigenous People of Biafra.

Mr. Vice Chancellor, the Nigerian government may need to adopt policies and measures which cater to the inclusiveness of citizens. Nationalism campaign inevitably has implications for ethnic

minority rights; once a government places the interests and welfare of a particular ethnic group above other considerations, such preferences create room for agitations by other members of the public. There are no new problems in Nigeria outside the unresolved issues regarding ethnic minority rights and religious bigotry. The federal government needs to constitute a committee of former Nigerian leaders to advise Nigeria on more effective ways of solving the problems of ethnic minority rights. Indubitably, ethnicity has implications for elections. Democratically, it is the census of a state or region that determines its seats in parliament. In US presidential election, for example, the citizens vote directly to elect their president and also indirectly through the Electoral College. Presidential candidates normally focus more attention to win elections in swing states like California. In US election history, swing states have swung back and forth between Republicans and Democrats. States with high population density are referred to as swing states. A presidential candidate is expected to poll a minimum of 270 votes in the Electoral College to win a presidential election in the United States in addition to other considerations. Yet, Nigeria does not have reliable statistics of its population, but rather relies on the disputed 1963 and 2006 census to make projections of the population of its citizens.

## **THE FIRST REPUBLIC (1960-1966)**

The Nigerian nationalists used the pages of the newspapers to argue and win the battles on colonialism. The press created the platforms for the discussions and debates on the constitutional developments which culminated in the attainment of the nation's political independence. The media gave convincing reasons on the pages of the Nigerian newspapers why the British government should grant Nigeria political independence. However, no sooner had the country obtained its political independence from the British government than the prejudice of the north and south dichotomy emerged in the nation's politics and destroyed the sense of unity that had existed among the Nigerian leaders. It was against this background that the appointments of candidates into the public service by the federal government ceased to be on merit, but on tribal considerations. This turn of events in the nation's politics was so dramatic that one could hardly imagine that the same nationalities who collectively fought for the political independence of the country can be so divided on national issues. The forces of regionalism introduced into Nigerian politics suddenly took on a negative dimension that subsequently plunged the country into a thirty-month civil war Okotie (2008, p.78). This division did not end within the confines of politics alone, it also crept into the operations and activities of the Nigerian press. Incidentally, the major newspaper houses in the country were owned by politicians. Consequently, party leaders and owners of the major newspaper houses in the country simply converted their newspapers into platforms for launching verbal attacks against their political opponents.

Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, the first President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, used his West African Pilot Group of Newspapers established in 1937 to give expression to the activities of the Igbo State Union (ISU) and the National Council for Nigerian Citizens (NCNC). Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the Premier of the then Western Region, used his Tribune Newspaper, established in 1949 to promote the beliefs and ideology of the Action Group (AG). In contrast, there was no nationally acclaimed newspaper in the Northern region to articulate and advocate the position of the Northern People's Congress (NPC) on national issues. Since the NPC was the ruling party, what its leaders

lost to the opposition parties for not having a viable newspaper, they gained proportionately through the influence and support of the federal government for the party's programs and activities (Oboh, 2014).

The same newspapers the nationalists used to fight and convince the British government of the need to grant political freedom to Nigeria suddenly became the instruments of cruelty and pettiness in the hands of the politicians. Studies revealed that shortly before the outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War in 1966, the media began to sing discordant tunes. During the war, the goal of the Nigerian media was to sustain the unity of Nigeria, which they indirectly assisted the politicians to destroy (Sambe (2005, p. 154). The inflammatory news reports by Nigerian journalists on the disagreements between Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the leader of the Action Group (AG), and Chief Samuel Akintola, the deputy leader of the party, created the basis for the crises that culminated in the January 1966 coup. The electoral irregularities which occurred in the 1964/65 elections in the Western Region were allegedly carried out with the connivance of the Nigerian Electoral Commission to ensure the victory of the government-sponsored candidates in the elections. Unfortunately, the Nigerian journalists abandoned their role in the elections to uphold the sectarian views of their proprietors; hence, the argument that the Nigerian press inadvertently contributed to the collapse of the Nigerian First Republic. Each newspaper defended the ethnic and sectional interests of its proprietor on the crises until the military took undue advantage of the crises and overthrew the civilian government of Zik and Balewa's civilian administration on 15th January 1966.

## **THE SECOND REPUBLIC (1979-1983)**

Five political parties contested the 1979 Nigerian Presidential election. Chief Obafemi Awolowo contested the election on the platform of the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), while Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, contested the election on the platform of the Nigerian People's Party (NPP), Alhaji Shehu Shagari was the presidential candidate of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN). Alhaji Aminu Kano was the presidential flag bearer of the People's Redemption Party (PRP), while Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim contested the election under the auspices of the Great Nigeria People's Party (GNPP). Alhaji Shehu Shagari, the presidential candidate of the National Party of Nigeria, won the election. Chief MKO Abiola and member of the NPN established the Concord newspaper in 1980. The newspaper supported the federal government to insist that Shagari won the 1979 presidential election despite the obvious evidence which indicated that the election was rigged. The Shagari government later organized the 1983 general elections that were marred by different shades of electoral misconduct. The Nigerian judiciary was unable to resolve the petitions filed by the aggrieved candidates who contested the 1983 general elections due to government interference in the activities of the judiciary. The military again took undue advantage of the post-election crises to destroy the political structures of the Nigerian Second Republic.

## **THE FAILED THIRD REPUBLIC (1983 to 1999)**

General Mohammadu Buhari and his deputy, Brigadier Tunde Idiagbon, took over power from Shagari in December 1983. The Buhari Military Regime enacted the campaign on moral rearmament in Nigeria under the auspices of the 'War Against Indiscipline.' The program was

aimed at instilling discipline and ensuring that Nigerian citizens imbibe the appropriate conduct and behavior expected of citizens of civilized societies. As the Buhari Military regime was making progress, the United Nations soon noticed the cases of abuse of human rights preferred against the government. The human rights violations by the Buhari Military Regime tended to have undermined its efforts to revamp the Nigerian economy. It was the allegation of the abuse of human right by the government that General Ibrahim Babangida later exploited to organize a palace coup that terminated the Buhari-led Military Regime in August 1985.

General Ibrahim Babangida came to power with a promise to revamp the Nigerian economy. Perhaps, it was to have the public support that he required to implement his policy agenda for development that he repealed the anti-human rights laws enacted by his predecessor. Babangida adopted the civilian pattern of administration under a military regime. He recruited experts and professionals into his government and encouraged public participation in the formulation and implementation of government policy agenda for development. The initial commitment demonstrated by Babangida towards implementing democratic principles and values in governance endeared him to Nigerians and made many people to support the policies and programs of his government until 1993 when it became obvious to Nigerians that he was unwilling to relinquish power to a democratically elected government. The annulment of the June 12 1993 Presidential Election has erased whatever it was which Babangida may have done well in Nigeria. So, when pressure was mounted on him to either revalidate Abiola's electoral mandate or cause him to vacate his office, he decided to hand over power to an Interim Government, headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan on August 1993. Babangida will be remembered for his clear understanding of Nigerian problems and for his ability to carry his followers along with him. Unfortunately, Chief Ernest Shonekan could not resolve the problem of the June 12 presidential election. General Sanni Abacha took undue advantage of the fear of the potential disintegration of Nigeria following the crises which trailed June 12 to topple the Shonekan government in November 1993. Abacha remained in government until his death in June 1998. General Abdul Salam Abubakar took over the leadership of the country in June 1998 following the death of Abach. He organized the February 1999 Presidential election and handed over power to a democratically elected government of President Obasanjo on 29 May 1999.

## **THE NIGERIAN FOURTH REPUBLIC**

Nigeria has conducted seven general elections between 1999 and 2023. The first general elections took place on 27 February 1999. Former President Olusegun Obasanjo contested the election on the platform of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and defeated his close rival, Chief Olu Falae, who contested the election under the auspices of the Alliance for Democracy (AD). The media created the platforms for candidates to solicit voters' mandates in the elections. But Obasanjo seemed to have enjoyed more of media support in the election than the other candidates. The majority of the public believed that Obasanjo was the most deserving candidate in the 1999 presidential election. So, the media having helped him to win the election, also assisted his government to get the public support it required to implement its policies and programs. Obasanjo re-contested the 2003 general elections which took place on 19th April 2003 and won the election. Former President Umaru Yar'Adua took over from Obasanjo having won the 2007 presidential

election. Following the death of Yar'Adua, President Goodluck Jonathan took over the leadership of the country May 2010. Goodluck Jonathan contested 16<sup>th</sup> April 2011 presidential election on the platform of the PDP. He defeated Muhammadu Buhari who contested the election on the platform of the Congress for Democratic Change (CDC).

It is worth noting that the Nigerian Fourth Republic media landscape is similar to the one which has been in existence since the pre-colonial era to the present day. The Nigerian media seem to give more access and opportunity to politicians in the southern parts of the country to use the media during elections than those in the northern parts of the country. Arguably, the alliance between Buhari and Tinubu changed the negative perception which the media had about Buhari. Otherwise, many journalists had objections regarding Buhari's ability to respect democratic principles and values, considering the anti-democratic manner in which he led Nigeria as a military Head of State from December 1983 to August 1985. Notwithstanding, Buhari won the 2015 presidential election, which he contested on the platform of the All-Progressive Congress (APC). The APC was a merger of Nigeria's three largest opposition parties. The press, in line with its constitutional mandate, reported instances of children who voted in the 2015 presidential election (Etieyibo and Oboh, p.65). The media however ignored the complaints against the election and supported Buhari's second term in office. Unfortunately, Buhari's was later assessed by some sections of the country to have performed below public expectation in governance as the President of Nigeria from 2015 to 2023.

## **THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN MEDIA AND ELECTION**

Vice-Chancellor, among other considerations, it is the duty of government to identify ways and techniques the media can be deployed more effectively in the service of society. Traditionally, the media have some basic functions toward ensuring the smooth conduct of elections in democratic societies. These functions include: (1) creating awareness of the activities of the electoral commission, (2) providing information on political parties and their candidates, (3) reporting on election campaigns, (4) monitoring voting exercises, and the election results being released by the electoral commission. (5) In emerging democratic countries, the media also report on the activities of the law enforcement agencies deployed by the government to ensure the smooth conduct of elections. For example, there have been cases in Nigeria where the law enforcement agencies deployed by the federal government to protect the integrity of election exercises were later found supporting politicians to rig elections in the places, constituencies, and wards, where the politicians concerned had envisaged the least voters' support for them to win elections (Oboh 2022, p.23).

Let us examine in detail what the public may expect from the media in each of the phases of an election.

## **MEDIA AND ELECTION CAMPAIGN**

Constitutionally, it is the responsibility of the media to report on an election. The Nigerian Constitution forbids the media from playing the role of an advocate for government, political parties, or their candidates in an election. The media however, still covertly slant their news stories and editorials on elections in favor of certain candidates and parties. As discussed earlier, the media

and politicians are like the two sides of the same coin. Research has shown that ownership influence plays a major role in determining the structures and operations of any media system. Media proprietors exercise some degree of influence in determining the direction of media reports on issues and events in society. It has often been said that he or she that pays the piper dictates the tune of the music. Otherwise, the media will not have any problem giving equal attention to all the registered parties and their candidates in an election. In a modern democracy, it is the information the media provided on political parties and their candidates that subsequently determines the impression the public may have about the candidates, whether or not the public would consider them as being competent to serve in public office (Oboh,2022, p.29).

Walter Lippmann, a prominent American journalist, and scholar at Harvard University initiated the idea which created the basis for the emergence of the Agenda Setting Theory. In 1922, Lippmann conducted research to find out how the media often determine public opinion on issues in society and found that the members of the public do not necessarily respond to the actual events that occur in society, but to the pictures of those events painted by the media in their reports and editorials (McCombs, 2002: 1-2). Cohen later builds upon Lippmann's ideas to create the pathway for the agenda-setting theory. He argues that the world looks different to different people depending on what the media offer to the public. Cohen's writing became the basis of what we now call the agenda-setting function of the media (Du, 2008, p 4). Cohen further stresses that the press is more than a mere purveyor of information and opinion and that the press might be less influential in telling people what to think than actually telling them what to think about. Events and issues slowly gain public attention as the media continuously reports about the issues and events in their news and editorials.

An election campaign provides candidates the opportunity to solicit public support to win an election. Unlike previously when candidates could hide certain information about themselves from the public while soliciting voters' support to win elections, and yet win election. Now, it is relatively impossible for politicians to deceive the electorate regarding their true identity. This is because everything the public desires to know about any known politician is available online. Citizen journalists provide information on virtually everything. One of the challenges of voters having to rely on social media for information on candidates is the risk of them getting the wrong information about candidates. Citizen journalists are often in a hurry to report on issues, thereby paying little attention to the details of an event or issue. Social media spaces like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and others, have much information to offer the public on candidates for elections across the world, but not every piece of information on social media is correct (Oboh, 2022, p.37).

Traditional media are relatively more reliable and objective in providing news on issues and events than online channels. Yet, many media organizations are guilty of being involved in partisan politics in Nigeria. For example, the proprietor of the African Independent Television (AIT), High Chief Remond Dokpesi, is a member of the People's Democratic Party. The station usually slants its news stories and editorials on election matters to favor the members of the PDP, very much the same way TVC owned by Bola Ahmed Tinubu favors APC candidates when reporting on election. The owner of the Silver Bird Television, Ben Murray-Bruce, is also a member of the PDP. Consequently, Silver Bird is most likely to support PDP candidates in an election. The proprietors

of the above-mentioned media organisations supported the PDP administrations in Nigeria until 2015. The exception to this practice is the news coverage by Channel Television, owned by John Momoh, veteran broadcaster and journalist, ARISE Television and THISDAY newspaper, owned by Nduka Obaighbena, veteran media practitioner and a few other independent media organizations in the country, whose proprietors are not very well-known members of any particular political party in the country. The Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) normally supports the federal government's party in every administration in Nigeria being an arm of the Federal Ministry of Information. Between May 1999 and May 2015 when the PDP was the ruling party in Nigeria, the NTA supported the PDP candidates in the elections which took place within the period. From May 2015 up until now, NTA has been an advocate of the APC-led administration under the President Muhammadu Buhari led civilian administration.

Vice Chancellor, there is a need for the media to give equal attention and coverage to all political parties participating in an election. One major element of a liberal democracy is the freedom of expression it accords citizens. Democracy offers equal access to the public to use the media to disseminate news and information which are of public interest. Among the benefits of the media giving equal access and opportunity to candidates in the election is that it makes it easier for the members of the public to identify the more deserving candidates in the election and to vote them into government and parliaments. It is worth noting that an election campaign is a one-way communication process. It does not allow the citizens to ask candidates questions during the campaign. So, I would recommend that the media develop a template that allows citizens to ask questions during election campaign regarding the manifestoes and ideologies of the registered political parties and their candidates in election. The question-and-answer time would enable the public to determine the level of readiness of the candidates to serve in government and parliaments if elected into office. The present practice by the media whereby candidates are invited to media houses before elections to discuss the reasons they would like to serve in government or parliament is commendable. But the media should create the opportunities for citizens to ask questions after each candidate had presented his or her manifestoes to the public on a media platform. Arise Television, AIT and Channels are among the media houses in Nigeria that currently provide platforms for citizens' awareness on election process in Nigeria.

## **MEDIA, VOTING AND ELECTION OBSERVERS**

Voting is a process whereby the adult citizens of a democratic country cast their votes to elect deserving citizens into governments and parliaments for a given period or tenure. Voting seems to be the most important segment of an election. This is because the outcome of a voting exercise would normally show the winners and the losers of an election. It is during voting that the public witnessed various shades of electoral misconduct which has almost become an indispensable feature in elections in Nigeria. Electoral misconduct now comes in various shapes and sizes. An act of misconduct committed by a candidate or a group of persons may not have any significant impact on the result of an election if the misconduct was acknowledged by the electoral commission and appropriate action was taken to neutralize the effect of the misconduct. The situation becomes hopeless when the electoral commission is involved in the act of misconduct, which is often referred to as systemic electoral misconduct. This is because an electoral

commission, having compromised the integrity of an election process, has impliedly admitted that electoral misconduct is an offshoot of a legitimate election process. The outcome of such an election is often later disputed in the court of law by the aggrieved candidates who may have illegitimately lost elections to their political opponents.

In the more established democratic countries, voting exercise is done seamlessly using both the public and private platforms as polling booths. There were usually no claims or objections emanating from elections in the Global North until most recently. The US 2019 presidential election has shown that elections are now hardly free and fair even in the more developed nations of the world. Former US President Donald Trump, who contested the 2019 presidential election under the platform of the Republican Party accused President Joe Biden, Democratic Party flagbearer, of rigging the election, and yet the US election authorities had repeatedly affirmed that the 2019 US presidential election was credible and its integrity remains intact as one of the best elections ever held in the US's history. The allegations of irregularities that Trump leveled against the election have provided the basis for some emerging democratic countries to doubt the competence of the US government to criticize the outcome of elections in Africa.

The Federal Government of Nigeria would normally desire to ensure that elections are credible in the states where the candidates of the opposition parties are serving as governors, while the same government supports the governors of the ruling party to use whatever means possible to ensure that government-sponsored candidates win the governorship elections in their respective states. But recent experiences have shown that it is now impossible for the federal government to influence the outcome of an election in Nigeria without the connivance of the electoral commission. This is because once a particular voting exercise is concluded, the results of the election are immediately uploaded into the electoral commission portal and transmitted to its headquarters, so the chances of anyone altering such results have become almost impossible, which perhaps explains the reason for the credibility of the Edo and Ondo governorship elections of 2019 and 2020 respectively. For whatever reason, the Independent National Electoral Commission could not transmit the results of the 2023 Presidential Election from the polling booths to the INEC's portal. Given the opportunity, many politicians would like to rig elections, so long the electoral misconduct guarantees their chances of being elected into governments and parliaments.

It is the duty of the media to provide an update on elections, particularly on voting exercise. The media would normally keep the public abreast of the developments at the various polling booths in the country, explaining events and issues on voting exercises as they occur, providing updates on the incidents that occurred during voting exercises, and reporting on the efforts made by the electoral commission to ensure the success of the election. The media also report on the activities of law enforcement agencies toward ensuring that there is no breakdown of laws and order during elections. Constitutionally, the media are not allowed to comment on the outcome of an election in a manner that suggests the candidates or parties that are likely to win the election based on the preliminary reports on the election. But there have been instances where citizen journalists exaggerate issues while reporting on voting exercises in an election. Such tendencies of citizen journalists disseminating fake news on election results could undermine the peace and

development of the country, considering ways in which post-election crises contributed to destroying the political structures of the failed Nigerian republics.

## **MEDIA AND ELECTION RESULTS**

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is the body that has the authority to release the official version of an election results. The Nigerian electoral commission is usually very discreet in the manner in which it releases election results in Nigeria. The commission watches public mood on the outcome of a voting exercise, alongside the comments and utterances of candidates on the outcome of an election to determine when and how the results of an election will be released to the public in Nigeria. This is because of the possibility of some aggrieved candidates inciting idle youths with criminal records to resort to violence following the release of election results which perhaps, may not have favored the candidates concerned. Some staff members of the Nigerian Electoral Commission have lost their lives for announcing the results of an election. In many African countries, including Nigeria, announcing the results of an election is usually not an easy task. In Nigeria, state apparatus is usually deployed to the electoral commission headquarters each time the Chairman of the commission is to announce the winner of a presidential election in the country, and the same attention is given to State Electoral Retuning Officers each time they have to announce the results of governorship elections in the 36 states comprising Nigeria. It is pertinent to state that it is not the outcome of an election that initiates post-election violence, but the inflammatory comments and utterances made by the aggrieved candidates who contested and lost elections to their political opponents. Much of the post-election crisis being witnessed in Nigeria occur in the Northern and South Eastern Regions of Nigeria. The recent governorship elections conducted in Edo, Ondo, Ekiti, and Osun had no post-election violence. This was particularly commendable of the maturity of the candidates who lost in those elections.

The media should develop a template for reporting about post-election activities in Nigeria. The judiciary is gradually restoring hope in Nigerian elections. There have been instances in the recent elections in Nigeria where the candidates who were earlier declared winners later had their mandates reversed or nullified by the judiciary. It is therefore advisable that politicians seek redress in the court of law. The candidates who desire to serve either in governments or parliaments, but lacked the opportunity, should rather deploy their efforts into other areas of the nation's economy while they wait for another opportunity to contest an election. The attack on the US Capitol Hill on January 6 2020 by Trump's supporters has become a phenomenon as well as an example which unfortunately misrepresented the interest of American democracy. Still, as much as some members of the Republican Party try to find an explanation to exonerate Trump from the attack, so the majority of the US citizens distance themselves from the invasion and for whatever reason might be responsible for the attack of Capitol Hill. Democracy strives under a peaceful atmosphere, and yet relies on the judiciary to resolve the petitions which arose from the conduct of an election. Nigerian politicians should rather be more interested in the implication of elections for the peace and development of society than the desire by candidates to serve in governments and parliaments. Journalists should avoid taking sides with political parties and their candidates in elections. Otherwise, the media will be unable to objectively report on elections in Nigeria. The activities of the internal and external election observers should be closely monitored by the media to ensure

that they do not use their vantage position to undermine the interests of a political party or candidates in an election as portrayed by the visit by the British High Commission to Nigeria to the office of the Labour Party in Abuja January 2023.

## **NIGERIAN MEDIA STRUCTURES & OPERATIONS**

The media are the members of the Fourth Estates of the Realm, which explains why media organizations have been empowered by the constitution to hold the other three estates of government accountable to the people. This is because of the possibility of governments influencing the others arms of government (Oboh 2021, p.8). It is pertinent to note that the Constitutional Drafting Committee's (CDC), sub-committee on fundamental human rights, recommended that the draft constitution that gave birth to the 1979 should contain a provision granting press freedom to media practitioners in Nigeria. The recommendation was rejected by the CDC because the majority of the members of the CDC recognized the need to protect the freedom of the press, but the committee felt it would be unfair to give Nigerian citizens a lesser right to freedom of expression than to any organization or the media (Uvieghara, 1989, p. 375). This explains why the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) was registered under the Trade Union Act of 1978. Consequently, journalism is more of a trade today than a profession in Nigeria. The 1999 Nigerian Constitution, Section 39, Sub-Section 1, states that "Every person shall be entitled to the Freedom of Expression, including the freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without any interference. Whereas, Sub-Section 3, of the same section 39 states that ...nothing in this section shall invalidate any law in the constitution that is reasonably justifiable in a democratic society. Among the Laws that are referred to as being reasonably justifiable in the Nigerian Constitution include Libel, Slander, Sedition, Contempt of Court, Protected Areas, Official Secret Act, Classified Documents, State Security, Obscenity, and many others. The commitment by journalists to obey the above laws has implications for press freedom in Nigeria. For example, a journalist may be guilty of contempt of court when he or she refuses to disclose to a presiding judge the source of an information that formed the basis of a news story. On the contrary, it is unethical for journalists to disclose the identities of their news sources which was the reason Tunde Thomas and Nduka Irabor were sentenced to two years imprisonment by Buhari's Military Regime in 1984 because they refused to disclose the sources of their news stories. The limitations of press freedom are the reasons why media practitioners in Nigeria are less likely able to report on issues with the liberty in which the media in the Global North discuss national issues.

The US Revised Constitution of 1789 states unequivocally that the congress shall make no abridging the rights of the press, the freedom of religion, and the right of the citizens to gather and peacefully protest against any government policy or program. It is a nation's constitution that creates the legal framework for the freedom and liberties of its citizens and those of the media. The ownership pattern of a particular media plays a major role nonetheless in the quality of the editorial content of the media. The media organizations that have independent editorial policy are at liberty to choose what to publish or broadcast with little or no influence on the media. Some of the media organizations in Nigeria that have independent editorial policy, include: Punch,

THISDAY, and Vanguard for the print media, and ARISE, Channel, AIT, and Silver Bird for the electronic media.

My Vice-Chancellor, I would recommend that the Nigerian Union of Journalists sponsors a bill in the Nigerian parliament to ask for equal recognition for journalism equivalent of Medical Science, Accounting, Pharmacy, Nursing, Engineering, and among other orthodox professions in Nigeria. Now that the National Universities Commission (NUC) has unbundled mass communication programs into nine independent academic programs, it might be difficult for media profession to enjoy equal recognition like other professions. This is because the unbundling of mass communication by the NUC into nine independent academic programs has implications for media practice in Nigeria. The present nine programs that evolved from mass communication were not all developed for media practice. For example, strategic and corporate communication will meet the needs of organizations and governments more than the media. The earlier argument against mass communication as discipline was that the majority of the persons who teach and research in mass communication do not have degrees in communication and media-related fields. Besides, the Nigerian Union of Journalists does not seem to have an accredited school equivalent of medical science, for the training and re-training of its members like the services the West African College of Surgeons provides for the medical profession. The NUJ should review the entry requirements which an individual must possess to become a media practitioner in Nigeria. There have been cases where Media Excellence Awards were given to persons who have no degree or certificate in any media-related discipline. They were perhaps given the awards because they were able to use media facilities to disseminate messages in a manner which perhaps exceeded a given expectation based on the criteria for the awards. Given the practice where non-media experts contest for Media Excellence Awards, it will be difficult for other professions to take journalism seriously for whatever reason. It is inadmissible, for a very proficient pharmacist to be accorded the rights and privileges of a medical doctor for having the skills (call them competencies if like), that look similar to those of medical doctors.

## **NEED TO HAVE A BROAD-BASED PERCEPTION OF NIGERIA**

There is a need for media and politicians to have an enhanced perception of Nigeria, considering the huge achievements that have been made by countries that have similar ethnic configurations like Nigeria. The media and some elites often compare Nigeria to the more established democratic countries of the world, ignoring that many countries in the Global North were once in similar positions that Nigeria is in today without undermining certain areas in which Nigeria should have exceeded public expectations given the relative maturity of its democracy. Arguably, there is no country that has a homogenous population in the world. The United States, Great Britain, Canada, and Australia are examples of modern societies that have a mixed population of people of different ethnic nationalities. The citizens of these countries have learned to live together despite the intermittent cases of racial battles that occur in Europe and North America and among other regions. Racism has become an endemic feature in global politics and takes the form of ethnic determinism within countries. The North and South Dichotomy in Nigerian politics was invented by the Nigerian elite to protect their interests and not the interests of the citizens. So, it is a high time the Nigerian media and politicians focused more attention on matters which cater to the

interests of Nigeria instead of allowing a few politicians to fan the ember of disunity and hatred on the premise of cultural politics.

Vice Chancellor, I have discovered that people are more important than places. This is because the most beautiful places in the world were built by the citizens and strangers of the countries concerned. So, Nigeria can become one of the best places in the world if, and only if, the media, politicians, citizens as well as foreign nationals' resident in the country, jointly support the process of the development of the Nigerian political economy. A careful observation will reveal that the politicians in northern parts of Nigeria seem to be more interested in determining the direction of Nigeria politics in every administration, whereas the majority of the political leaders in southern parts of the country tend to have more interest in occupying political positions in government and parliament. There is a need for both the south and the north to have a broad-based vision that cater to interest of Nigeria. The struggle to control the political destiny of Nigeria by the north alongside the desire to hold political positions in government and parliaments by the south will become unnecessary once Nigerians agree to put the interest of the country above other considerations.

National growth and development are often achieved by the collective commitment and contributions of citizens without any exception to the contrary. Arguably, the majority of the candidates that run for elective positions in governments and parliaments do so to achieve their personal goals and aspirations. Nonetheless, elective positions and appointments in governments and parliaments are meant to serve the interest of the citizens and the country. The dictionary definition of the phrase; ACHIEVEMENT, appears to have been done in a hurry. Otherwise, no individual can achieve any worthwhile goal or objective without the support and goodwill of other people. The sense of entitlement achievement trusts upon a few individuals in society for the things, positions, and money they have is partly the reason every politician may want to serve in governments and parliaments at the same time. This is because securing an elective or a political appointment has become one of the easiest routes for one to escape poverty in Africa. So, there is a need for the media to re-educate the citizens on the purpose of one serving in public office. The Nigerian media like their counterparts in the more developed nations of the world should place the interest of Nigeria above ethnic and religious considerations. Constitutionally, journalists are expected to uphold the principles and values of equity and justice. The essence of democracy is in the application of the rule of law. In many African countries, certain individuals are above the law. Even the court equivocates each time it has to decide over a case involving some members of the ruling elite in Nigeria. It is a bad practice.

## **SUMMARY/CONCLUSION**

This inaugural lecture, entitled: 'THE SAME DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE MEDIA AND POLITICIANS HAS IMPLICATION FOR NIGERIAN ELECTIONS' reviewed the interface between the media and elections in Nigerian democracy. The major problem confronting African democracy, including Nigeria, is the inability of governments to resolve post-election crises in the region. The Nigerian First Republic for example, failed as a result of the failure of the federal government to resolve the 1964/65 post-election conflicts in the Western Region. The leaders in

the first republic and media proprietors used their newspapers as platforms to fight wars of personal vendetta until the collapse of the first republic in January 1966. The Second and the Third Republics failed as a result of the issues regarding elections. The south-north dichotomy invented by Nigerian politicians has become the basis for suspicion and mistrust between the politicians in the southern parts and the politicians in the northern parts of the country. In the struggle for relevance, the politicians in the southern parts of Nigeria seem to enjoy more media support than their counterparts in the northern parts of the country. This is because the owners of the majority of the media institutions in Nigeria are citizens of southern extractions, and over 70 percent of the media organizations in the country are located in the southern parts of Nigeria. Since ownership has implications on the editorial content of the media, there is the likelihood of some media organizations siding with the politicians in the southern parts of the country to win elections.

This lecture has explained various ways the media can be deployed more effectively to enhance the conduct of elections in Nigeria. It further discussed the techniques the media could employ to facilitate the coverage of elections. Electoral misconduct has almost become a permanent feature in Nigerian politics. The writer has explained ways the media could support the Independent National Electoral Commission electoral to conduct free and fair elections in the country. It was noted however, that there is no provision for press freedom equivalent of the type of press freedom available in the more established nations of the world. The 1999 Nigerian Constitution offers citizens, media and corporate organizations freedom of expression. This lecture recommended that the media work toward having a more specific provision that will guarantee press freedom in Nigeria. The lecture urges the media to give equal attention and coverage to politicians, whether of northern or southern extractions, and report on the election processes for the benefit of the electorate. The primary responsibility of the media in an election would be to ensure that the process is free and credible. The attitude of some journalists of having to covertly slant their news coverage and editorials on elections to support certain candidates should be discouraged, considering the negative implication of media involvement in partisan politics. The lecture recommends to politicians be broad-minded and always put the interests of Nigeria above other considerations. The cold war between the politicians in the southern parts and those in the northern parts will end if the purpose of governments and parliaments in Nigeria would be to promote the interests and welfare of the citizens.

## **POLICY-BASED RECOMMENDATIONS**

- First, I would recommend that Nigeria organizes a census to determine the actual population of its citizens being a pre-condition to ensuring the conduct of credible elections in any society.
- Media should not be involved in partisan politics or play the role of an advocate for any political party or candidate.
- Nigerian media are advised to develop a template for the election campaign being held on media platforms. Channel Television, AIT, and Arise are among the media houses that organize Citizen Awareness Campaign Program on Elections in Nigeria.

- Media reports of election results should not contradict the official results of elections as approved by the electoral commission. The media should allow the judiciary to resolve the claims and objections arising from an election.
- This lecture recommends that government allows the media to constitute the Nigerian Media Council in the manner equivalent to the Council for Legal Education, the Nigerian Judicial Commission, and the councils of other orthodox professions in Nigeria.
- The NUJ is advised to take further steps towards ensuring that media practice becomes a more respectable profession in Nigeria.

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Godwin Ehiarekhian Oboh is a Professor of Media Studies and Dean of the Faculty of Social and Management Sciences, Benin City, Nigeria. He was born in 1964 at Irrua Memorial Hospital in Esan Central Local Government Area of Edo State. He is married to Caroline Eseoghene Nakpoberuo Oboh.

Professor Oboh had his primary school education at Uzoghola Primary School in Ewu and Secondary School Education at Ozolua Grammar School, Ologbo, Benin City. He received the Bachelor of Arts Degree in Mass Communication from Delta State University, Abraka, and Master's Degree in Mass Communication from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He obtained a PhD in Media Studies at the University of Derby, England, United Kingdom.

Professor Oboh started his academic career at Covenant University, Ota, as a pioneer staff of the department of Mass Communication in 2002. He transferred his services from Covenant University to Benson Idahosa University in 2005 as Lecturer 1. He was the Ag. Head of Department of Mass Communication, BIU from 2006 to 2009; and from 2013 to 2018. He served as the substantive head of Mass Comm Department from 2020 to 2021. He was appointed the Dean of Faculty of Social and Management Sciences October 2021 being the position he holds to the present day.

Professor Oboh was a Visiting Lecturer to the Department of Mass Communication, University of Benin, from 2014 to 2020. He served at Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo, from 2018 to 2019 while on Sabbatical Leave at the university. In 2019, he was away from BIU on Leave of Absence. During the period, he served at Delta State University, Abraka, on Sabbatical Appointment. He was the Head of Department of Mass Communication at DELSU from 2019 to 2020.

Professor Oboh is a member of the NUC Accreditation Panel. He was among the 12 Professors invited by the NUC in 2018 to initiate the process of the unbundling of Mass Communication Program in the Nigerian universities. He currently serves as an External Assessor to universities on the review of senior academics found appointable to the rank of professorial cadre.

Professor Oboh serves in the editorial boards of many journals and books. He reviews papers for journals, including: Wiley, ROUTLEDGE, African Identities, Cogent Social Science, and many others. He has published widely in journals and books. His books are in 57 world class universities libraries, which include: Harvard, British Library, Library of Congress, Standford, and others. He has travelled to many countries to present academic papers. The countries include: Japan, Seattle Washington and Puerto Rico-both in US, South Africa and United Kingdom.

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