

# EXECUTIVE

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**A Public Assessment Of President Obasanjo's  
Government Policy Statements And Actions**

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**JANUARY 2000**

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**...promoting and protecting press freedom and freedom of  
expression in Nigeria.**

## **EXECUTIVE WATCH**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Executive Watch is a project of Media Rights Agenda under which it monitors the activities and policies of the Executive arm of Government, particularly the Presidency, to ascertain the popularity such activities and policies enjoy among a wide spectrum of Nigerians.

The overall objective of the project is to keep track of the Executive's performance and popularity and serve as a feedback to the government to enable it serve Nigerians better.

The monitoring exercise will be carried out on a monthly basis and would involve identification of some major policy decisions, comments and actions of the Executive, particularly President Olusegun Obasanjo, during the preceding months.

This pilot report under this project has been limited to the views of respondents in the Lagos area.

### **SUMMARY OF RESULT**

#### **Most Lagosians Support President Obasanjo's Handling of the Buhari Saga**

Majority of Lagosians have expressed support for President Olusegun Obasanjo in his handling of the age declaration falsification and certificate forgery charges against the former Speaker of the Federal House of Representatives, Alhaji Salisu Buhari.

Over two thirds of Lagos residents believe the President's action on the issue is in line with constitutional provisions. But for the slightly less than one third of Lagosians, who disagree with President Obasanjo in his handling of the issue, a slight majority of them are of the opinion that the President's position was not within the ambit of the Constitution, while the others say his handling of the Buhari Saga lacks political expediency.

These views of Lagosians is the out come of a survey carried out by Media Rights Agenda, a press freedom and freedom of expression group.

It could be recall that when *The NEWS* magazine first broke the news that the former Speaker of the House of Representative falsified his age and academic qualifications, the Special Adviser on Media and Publicity to the President, Dr Doyin Okupe, told the press that President Obasanjo had taken the decision not to involve the Presidency in the investigation

The Survey conducted between August 7 and 14, involved the administration of 800 questionnaires comprising close-ended questions which sought to know from respondents whether they consider as appropriate President Olusegun Obasanjo's non-interference posture on the Buhari Saga, by indicating "Yes" or "No".

Other questions sought to establish from respondents who answered “Yes” if this is predicated on their perceived constitutionality of President Obasanjo’s action or political expediency.

But for respondents who disagree with President Obasanjo’s position in the Buhari Saga, they were also asked to indicate if this was based on its unconstitutionality or lack of political suave.

Further, respondents who opined that they disagree with President Obasanjo’s handling of the matter were asked what they would have expected the President to do. They were asked to choose between the options of the President **ordering** the former speaker’s immediate arrest and prosecution or **directing** the law enforcement agencies to wade into the matter.

Out of the 800 questionnaires distributed, 650 were returned showing a return rate of 81.3 per cent and thus a mortality rate of 18.7 percent. Of the 650 respondents, 454 say they consider President Obasanjo’s handling of the former speaker’s forgery and perjury charges appropriate, while the 196 other respondents say they do not agree with President Obasanjo. These numbers stand at 69.9 per cent for and 30.1 per cent against.

The questionnaire was deliberately distributed to include people of three broad educational backgrounds. These include people with no formal education up to primary education, post primary level and post secondary in the ratio of 60, 140 and 600. From the total of 650 respondents, 54 of them are not formally educated or have at most, primary school education background. Among them, 46 support President Obasanjo’s non-interference posture on the former speaker’s case representing a sub-group percentage of 85.2 as against eight, representing 14.8 per cent that disagree with President Obasanjo.

Also, 138 of the respondents have a post-primary education background. Out of this group of respondents, 118, representing 85.5 percent approve of President Obasanjo handling of the issue and the remaining 20, i.e. 14.5 per cent disagree.

The remaining bulk of 416 respondents all have post-secondary education background. Out of these, 290 representing 69.7 per cent, also support President Obasanjo and the 136 others representing 30.3 per cent disagree.

Furthermore, out of the 46 respondents who have at most a primary school educational background and who support President Obasanjo on the Buhari crisis, 20 of them, representing 43.5 per cent, say they do because the President’s non-interference position is in line with Constitutional provisions while the remaining other 26 respondents in this category say they support the President because his position was politically expedient.

But for the 118 respondents who are educated up to post-primary school and who support President Obasanjo, 86 of them making 71.6 per cent say they do because President Obasanjo’s position was constitutionally supported and the remaining 34, i.e. 28.4 per cent support the President because his position is considered politically expedient.

In the case of the 290 respondents, who have post-secondary educational background and who support President Obasanjo, 234 representing 80.7% say they do because the President's position is constitutional while 56 representing 19.3% say it is because his position is politically expedient

On the other hand, out of the total of 164 respondents who do not agree with President Obasanjo's handling of the Buhari saga, two of them, having a maximum of primary school education, say the President's position was unconstitutional. This is against the four respondent in the group who say the President was not right in his handling of the Buhari crisis based on its lack of political expediency. Two others did not indicate their reasons.

Also, out of the 20 respondents in the group of respondents who have a post-primary educational background and who disagree with President Obasanjo in his handling of the issue, 12 believe President Obasanjo did not act within the ambit of the Constitution while six say the President's handling of the issue was not politically expedient.

Similarly 62 of the 136 respondents in the group with post-secondary educational background say they disagree with the President because his position was unconstitutional and 34 others say it was not politically expedient. Thirty respondents in this group did not indicate why they do not agree with President Obasanjo's handling of the Buhari's saga.

Indeed, the view of most of the respondents to the effect that President Obasanjo's non-interference position on the Buhari saga is in line with Constitutional provisions, is a fact. Section 5 (1) (b) of the 1999 Constitution provides that the executive powers of the federation:

*Shall extend to the execution and maintenance of this Constitution, all laws made by the National Assembly and to all matters with respect to which the National Assembly has, for the time being, powers to make laws.*

But, beyond this general mandate that the executive, represented by the President, shall see to the execution and maintenance of the Constitution, there is no where else in the document which conferred on the President any power to order the former Speaker's arrest. Hence for those who believe the President is invested with such powers, they are obviously relying on the interpretations that the President has the Constitutional duty to see to the maintenance of the Constitution.

In response to the question which asked respondents who disagree with President Obasanjo's handling of the issue how they would have wanted the President to have handled the Buhari saga, 28 of the respondents with the post-secondary education background group preferred that the President had **ordered** the former speaker's immediate arrest and prosecution while 48 respondents choose the option which says President Obasanjo should have specifically mandated the law enforcement agencies to wade into the matter. Sixty 60 respondents in this group did not indicate a wish. For the 20 respondents who have post-secondary education background and do not agree with President Obasanjo's handling of the issue, two of them would have wished the President ordered that the former Speaker be immediately arrested and prosecuted and two would have preferred the President mandates the law enforcement agent to step into the matter. Six elected no option.

Lastly, out of the 8 respondents in the non-formal primary educational background group, two elected the option that the President should have called in the law enforcement agencies while the remaining six did not indicate any option.

## **BACKGROUND**

Alexandra Pope once posited that: “For forms of government, let’s fools debate, what is best, is best administered”. What the learned gentleman was trying to convey is that there is inherently no form of government that guarantees fulfillment of the people’s aspiration, be it an authoritarian or feudal government, communism or democracy. To him the temperament and vision of the leaders determine the success or otherwise of the government.

But some people would consider Alexandra Pope’s position to be an exercise in sterile academism. To them, democracy is the beacon of good governance. This is essentially so for two basic reasons. The first is because of the elaborate provisions it makes for the psychological appeasement of the people by way of giving them the dignity of having been given a say in deciding who does, or who does not, govern them. It is obviously with this at the back of his mind that former American President Abraham Lincoln defined democracy as a “government of the people by the people for the people.” The other reason is the checks and balances provided for leaders in a democratic setting. These make democracy the chief appeal as a form of government to many people all over the world. Hence several countries of the world are fast embracing democratic rule. It is believed that autocratic rule is archaic, barbaric and old fashioned. This was one of the basis for the Africa leaders at the 35<sup>th</sup> O.A.U Summit in the Algerian Capital of Algiers to pass an anti-coup resolution which says any government that comes to power in any African country through a coup d-etat, would be diplomatically isolated. In effect such a leader, would not be admitted as a member of O.A.U.

It is also worthy of note that with three decades of military rule (1966 – 1979) and (1983 – 1999), Nigeria has been brutalized and bastardized in the face of the outside world. In this age of democracy “sweeping” through the entire world, no one is left in the doubt that military rule is an aberration and a phenomenon with more vices than virtues, if any.

There had been occasions when Nigeria’s military rulers have aborted series of moves to restore Nigeria to a civilized system of governance, democracy. For example, General Yakubu Gowon refused to hand-over to civilians in 1976 as promised. On three occasions, General Ibrahim Babangida postponed handing-over to an elected government. When he finally ‘stepped aside’, he left the country in a mess never witnessed before in the country’s history and handed the government over to an unelected interim government. Like a pack of cards, the Interim National Government collapsed to the whims of General Abacha, who until his death was planning to succeed himself and thereby perpetuate his regime. In this circumstance, it comes as no surprise that development has been a victim of authoritarianism in Nigeria. A country whose founding fathers had work relentlessly for a Federal system of government with decentralized powers, but which the military turned into a Unitary State.

That Nigeria is long overdue for a democratic governance is not in dispute. Everyone, both old and young, civilians and military populations, except for small cabal, have since agreed on the need to restore democracy in Nigeria with utmost urgency and have fought tooth and nail in its quest.

For the new democracy to be sustainable, we must draw some lessons from the past mistakes and be able to guide against the future of the new democracy. It is with this as a motivation that Media Rights Agenda has undertaken this project: “Executive Watch”. The project seeks to monitor the new government of President Obasanjo to guide against possible derailment. It is to act as a feed back to President Obasanjo on what the populace, cutting across all sections of the society, feel about his policies and decisions, and also their reaction to his statements on crucial state matters.

Media Rights Agenda was involved in activities aimed at developing integrity in the electoral process during the transition by monitoring and reporting on the prosecution of the political transition programme and as well monitoring and reporting on the media coverage of the process to determine the extent of fairness exhibited by it in giving each political party equal access to air its views. (see *Media Scorecard* and *Airwaves Scorecard*, Media Rights Agenda, (January, February, March, April, May and June, 1999)).

## **OBJECTIVES**

That Nigerian recently passed through one its most trying periods in her political history is not debatable. With that experience in mind, and a desire to ensure the success of the present civilian democratic government, Media Rights Agenda (MRA) is undertaking to monitor some major activities and policies of President Olusegun Obasanjo the aims of which are:

- to ascertain the popularity such activities and policies enjoy among a wide spectrum of Nigerians
- to ascertain how well the government is carrying along the Nigerian people who had given all to ensure the enthronement of a civilian democratic government.

The overall objective being, not only to keep track of the President’s performance and popularity, but also serve as a feed back to the government to enable it, accordingly, serve Nigerians better.

## **METHODOLOGY**

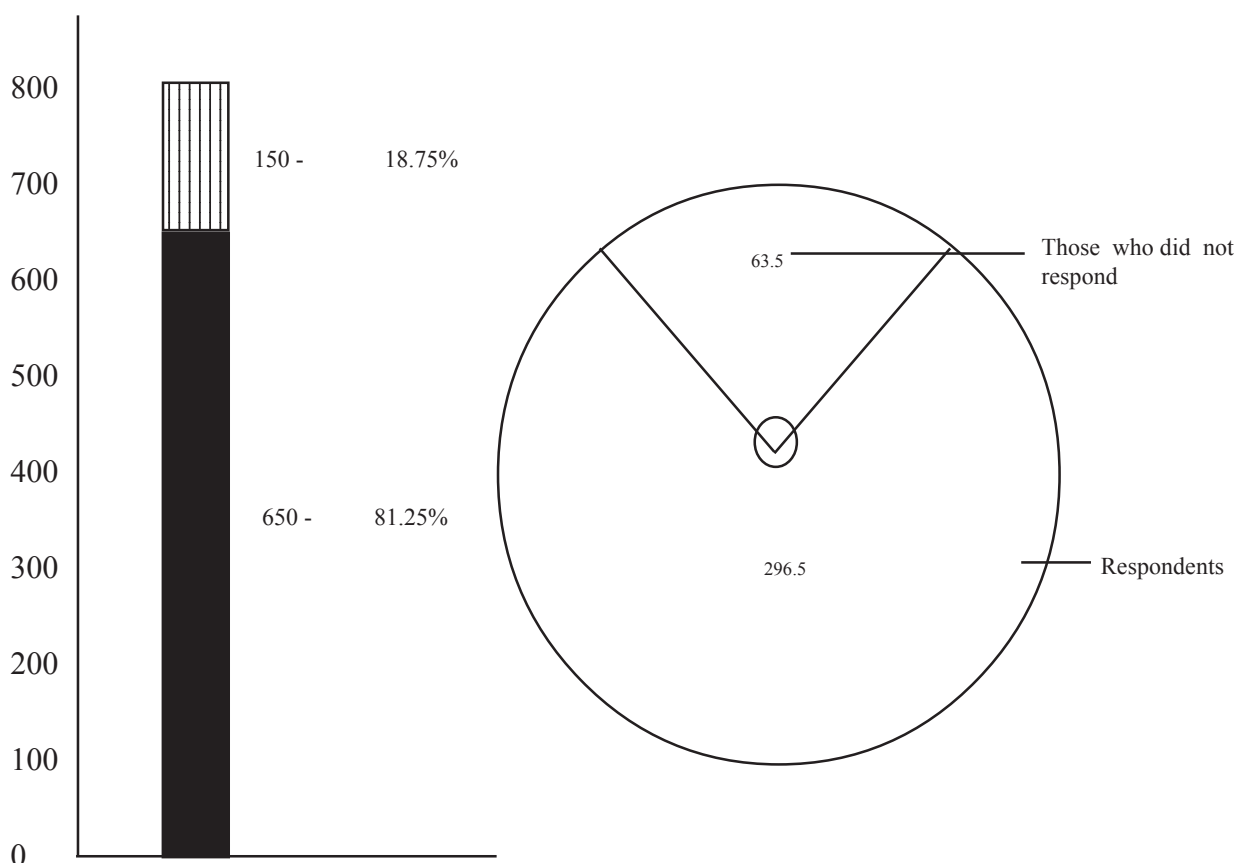
- This pilot exercise is restricted to Lagos State.
- It involves the administration of structured questionnaires of four questions.
- The sample comprises 800 respondents aged between 18 years and above both male and female.
- The sample is made up of three sub-groups of persons which include people with non-formal education /those who attained primary school level, post-primary school level and post-secondary school level.
- The three sub-groups are represented in the sample in the ratio of 60, 140 and 600 respectively.
- The sub-group of non-formal education/primary school level were assisted by MRA’s researchers to read and interpret the questions and elect appropriate options according to the preferences of the respondents concerned.

# PRESENTATION OF RESULT

## ACHIEVED SAMPLE

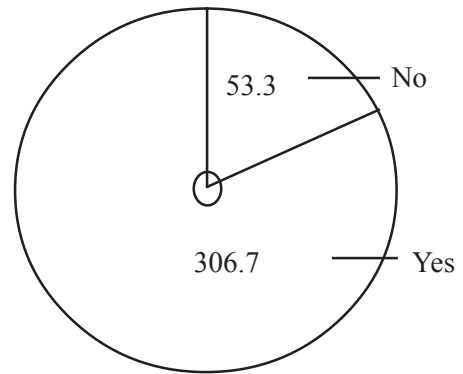
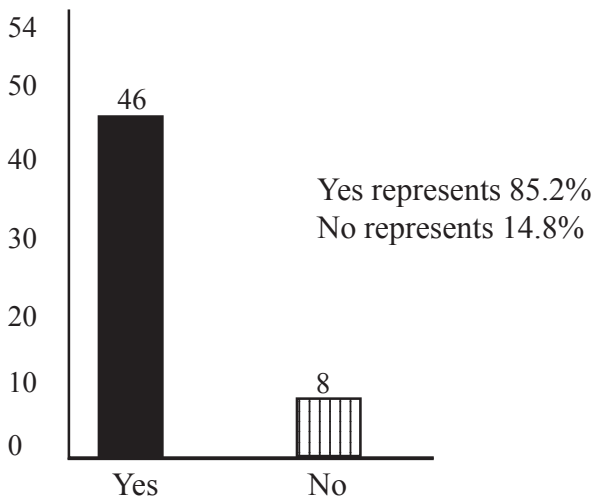
Sample groups	Nos of questionnaires administered	Nos of questionnaires received and %	Nos of questionnaires not received and %
Non formal/primary school level	60	54 90%	6 10%
Post primary education	140	138 98.6%	2 1.4%
Post secondary education	600	416 69.3%	184 30.6%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>Cummulative 800</b>	<b>Cummulative % 81.25%</b>	<b>Cummulative % 18.75%</b>

## QUESTIONNAIRE RATE OF RETURN / MORTALITY

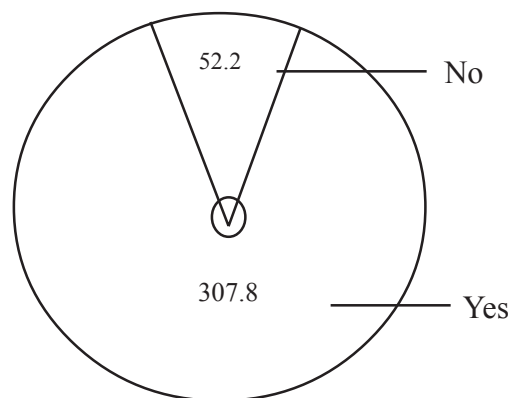
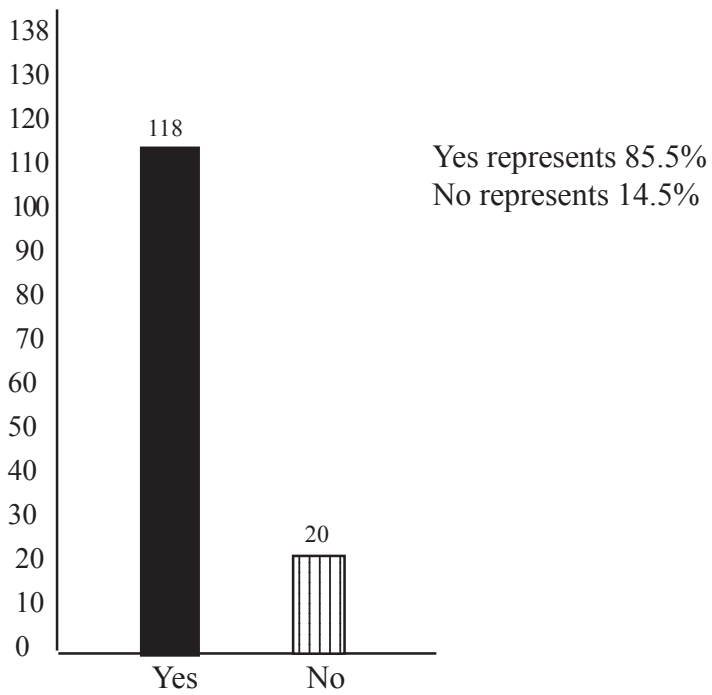


Q1. Do you consider President Obasanjo's option in the Buhari saga appropriate? Yes  No

### Non-Formal/Primary Education Sub-group

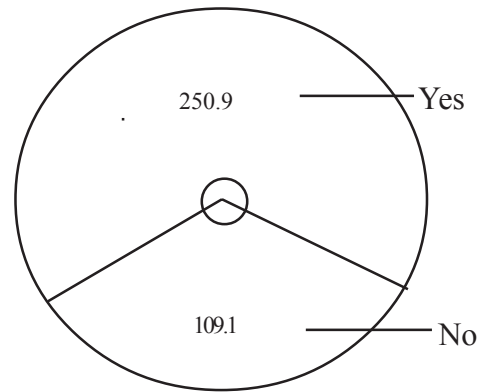
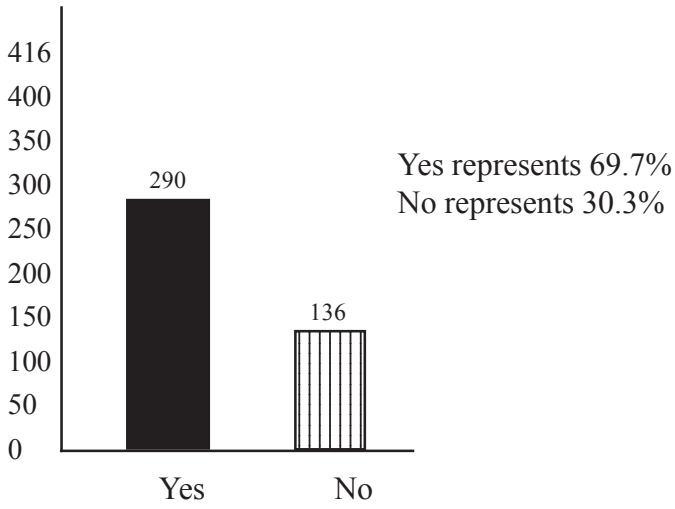


### Post-Primary

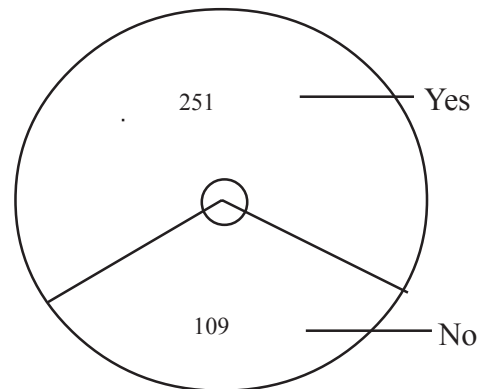
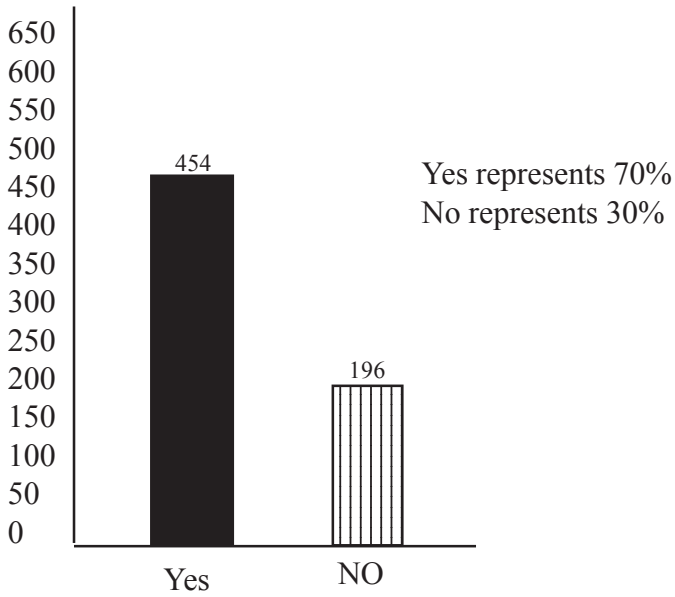




### Post -Secondary



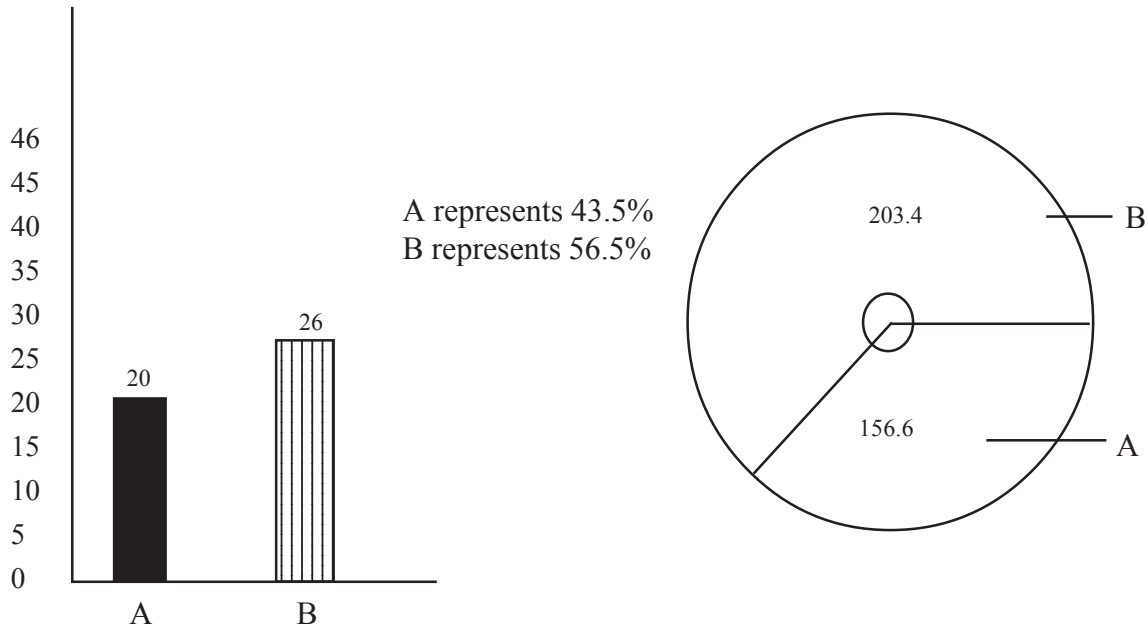
### Aggregate Response



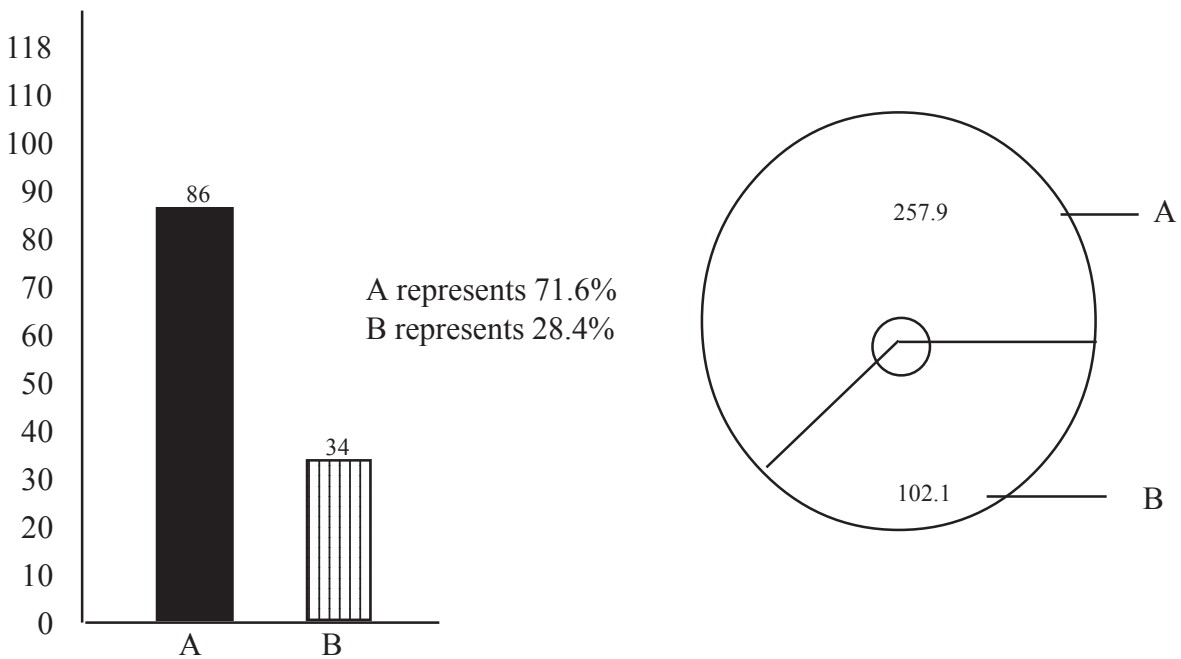
Q2. If your answer to question 1 is “Yes” it is because

- a. President Obasanjo’s position is in line with Constitutional provisions
- b. President Obasanjo’s position is politically expedient

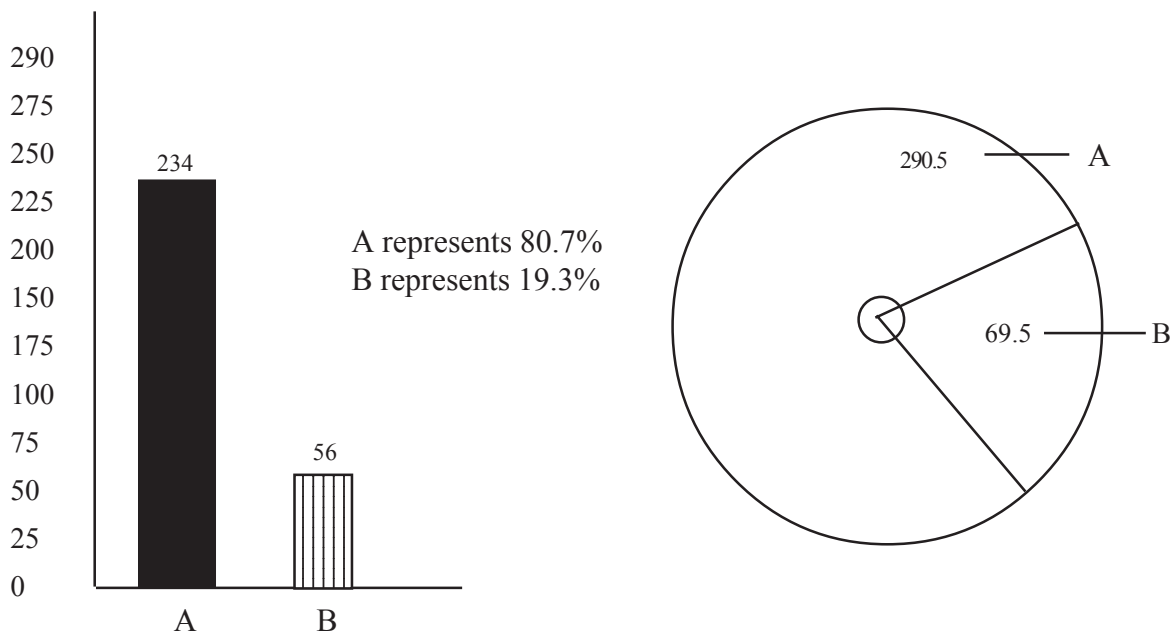
**Non-Formal/Primary Education**



**Post-Primary Education**



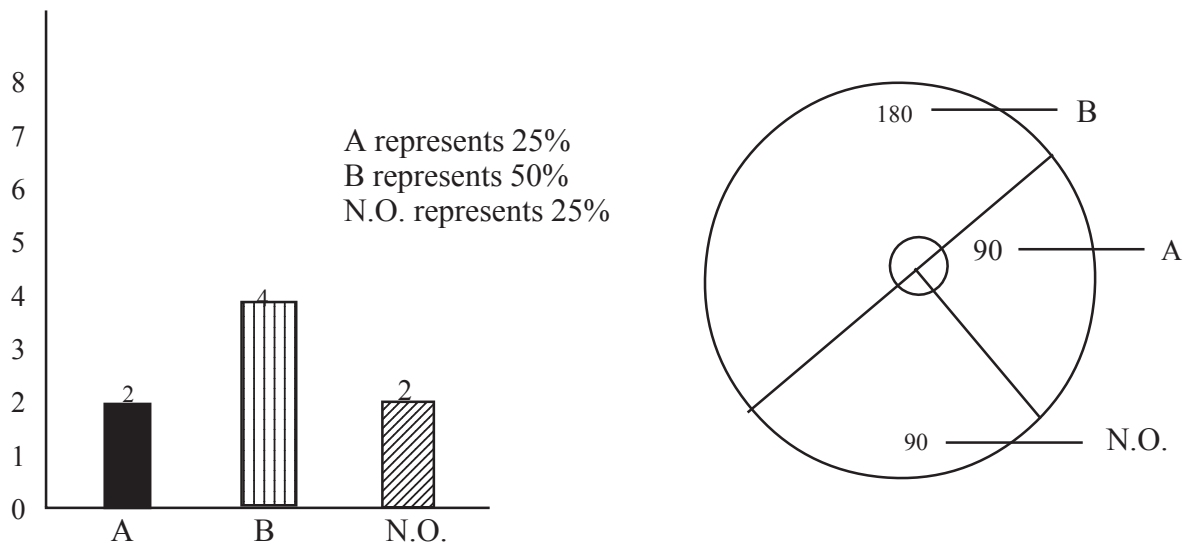
**Post-Secondary**



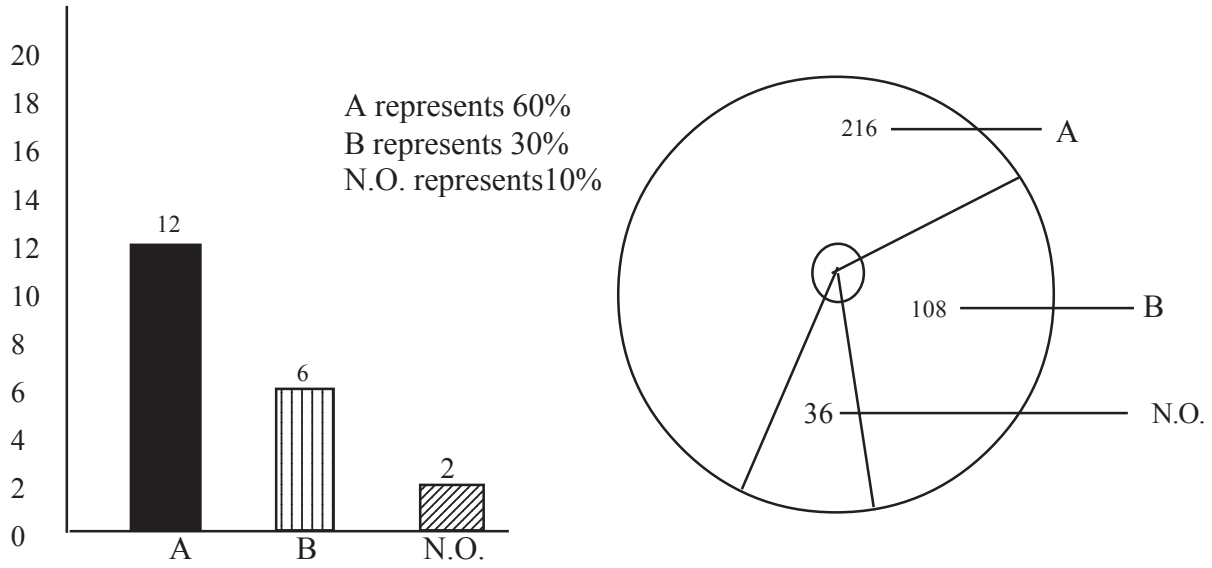
Q3. If your answer to question 1 is “No” it is because,

- a. President Obasanjo’s position is not line with Consitutional provisions
- b. President Obasanjo’s position is not politically expedient

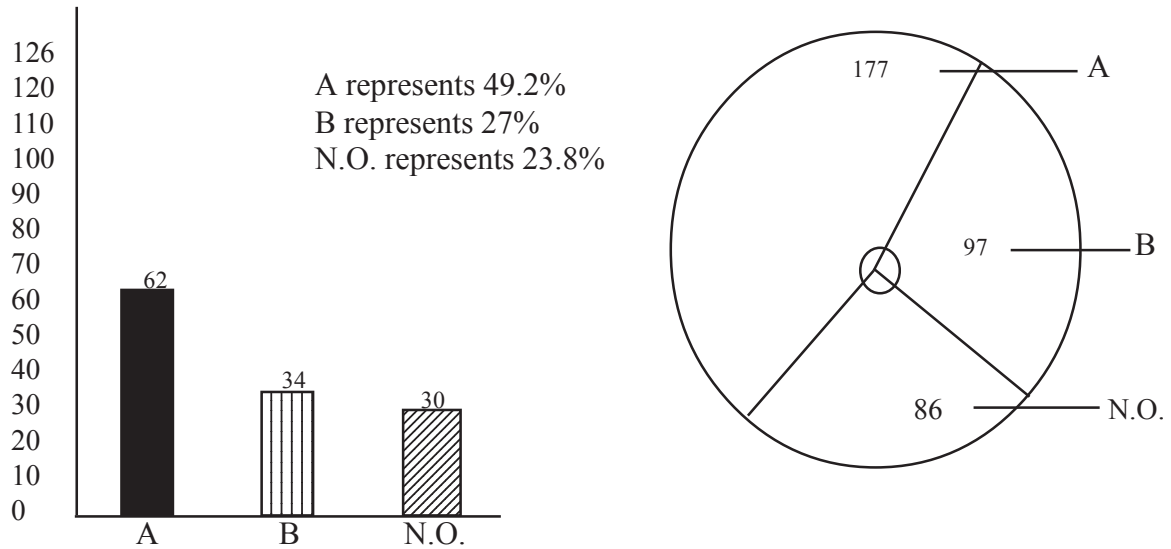
**Non-Formal/ Primary Education**



### Post-Primary



### Post-Secondary

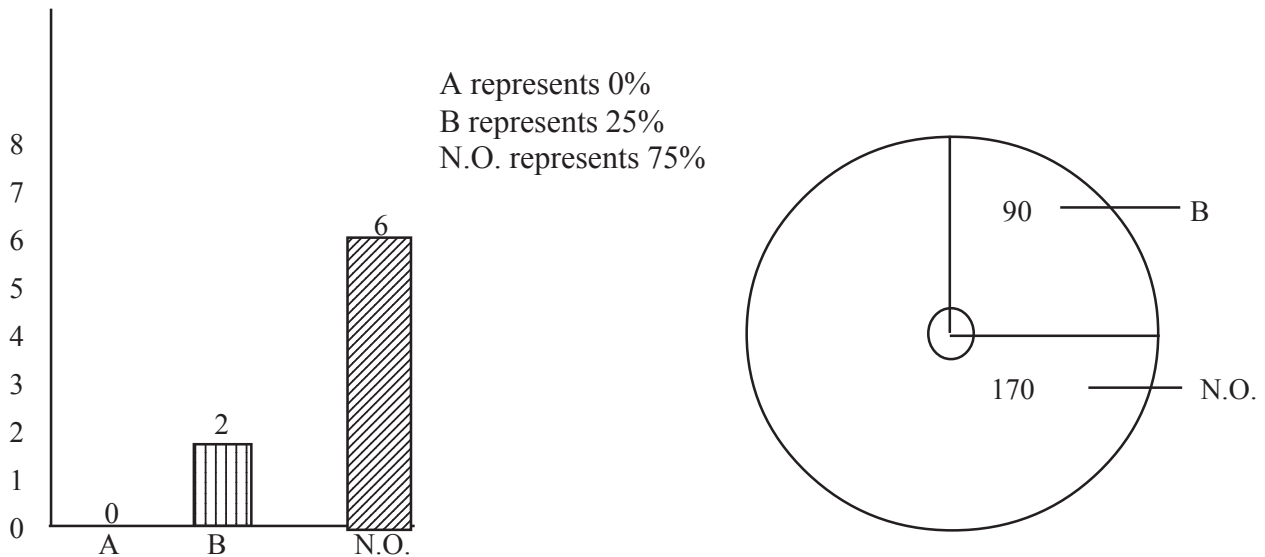


Q4. If your answer to question 1 is “No”, you would have expected President Obasanjo to have

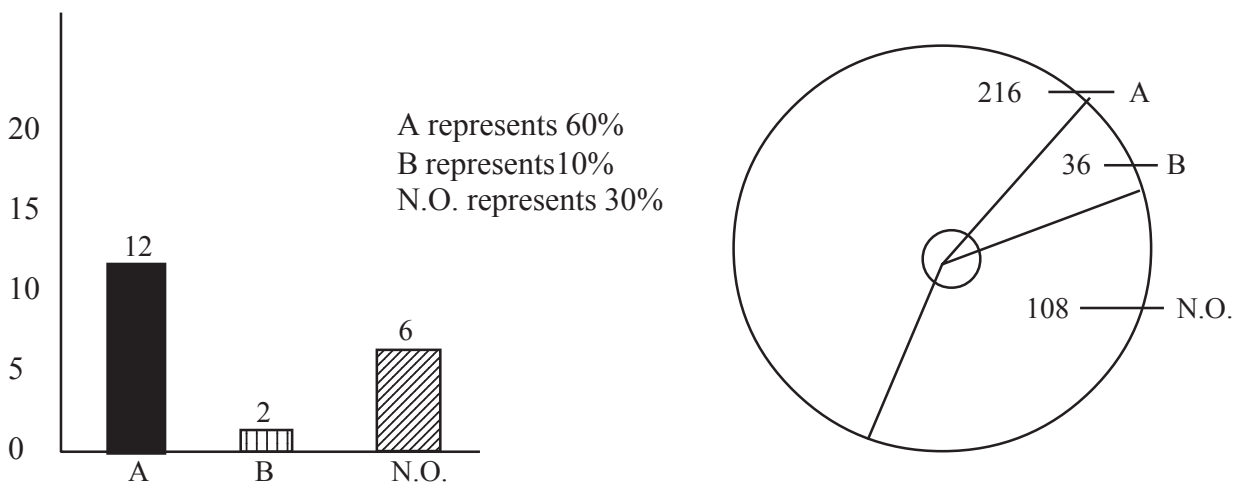
a. **Ordered** the former Speaker’s immediate arrest and prosecution

b. Specifically **mandated** the law enforcement agencies to wade into the matter

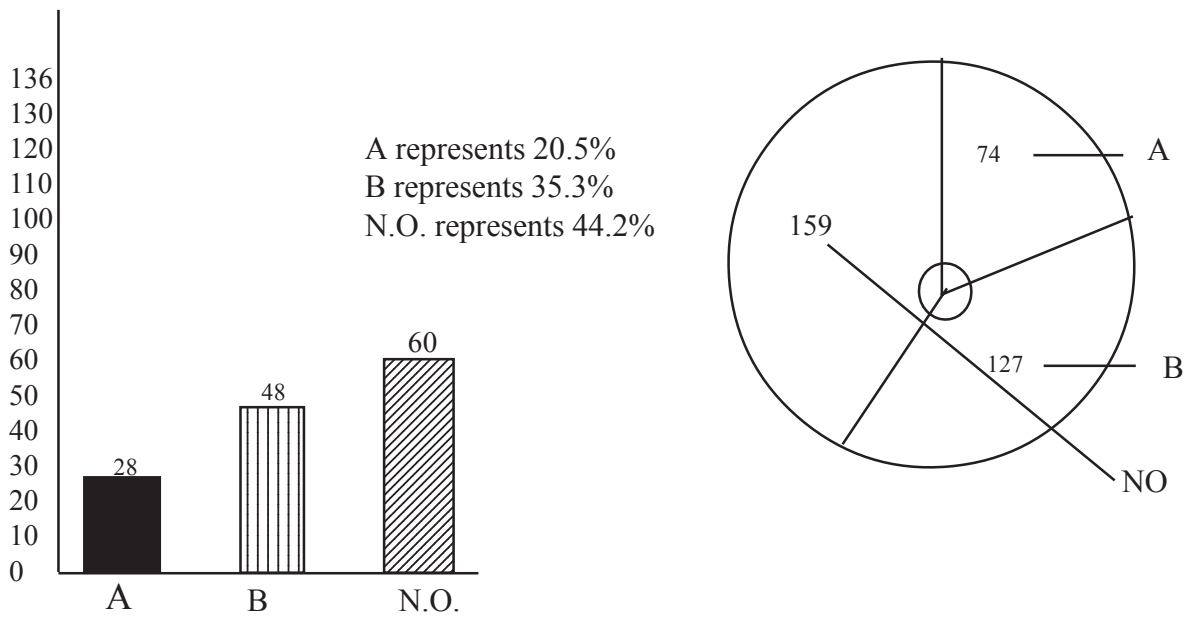
### Non-Formal/Primary Education



### Post-primary



## Post -Secondary





Media Rights Agenda (MRA) is an independent, non-governmental organisation established for the purpose of promoting and protecting press freedom and freedom of expression in Nigeria. The MRA is registered under Nigerian law and has Observer Status with the African Commission on Human and People's Rights. MRA's Aims and Objectives are:

- a. to promote respect and recognition for press freedom and freedom of expression in Nigeria;
- b. to provide protection and support for journalists and writers engaged in the lawful pursuit of their professional duties;
- c. to promote the highest standards of professional ethics, integrity, training and conduct in the journalism profession; and
- d. to bring about a conducive social and legal atmosphere for the practice of journalism, and ensure the protection of the journalist's right not to be compelled to work against his or her conviction or disclose confidential sources of information.

### **Executive Committee**

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**Tunde Fagbohunlu**, Director of Legal Services  
**Morenike Ransome-Kuti**, Director of Research  
**Austin Agbonsuremi**, Director of Publications  
**Eze Anaba**, Director of Projects  
**Tive Denedo**, Director of Campaigns  
**Josephine Izuagie**, Treasurer  
**Anselm Chidi Odinkalu**, Member

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**Osaro Odemwingie**, Publications Officer  
**Maxwell Kadiri**, Legal Officer  
**Adeola Ademola**, Legal Officer  
**Ese Acholomu**, Legal Officer  
**Ayode Longe**, Programme Officer  
**Ademoyewa Johnson**, Campaigns Officer  
**Joy Kadiri**, Accountant  
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