

Media Scorecard

**Report of the Print Media Coverage of the
Political Transition Programme.**



January 1999

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

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This report of Print Media Monitoring was conducted by **Media Rights Agenda** (MRA), a non governmental organisation established for the purpose of promoting and protecting press freedom and freedom of expression in Nigeria.

The aims are to examine the extent of fairness exhibited by the broadcast media in giving each political party free, equal and uninhibited access to air their views not minding the role such party or individual might have played in previous dispensations.

This is especially important because of the invaluable role the media can play in helping to enthrone and sustain functional democracy, mostly by giving the electorate opportunities to appropriately familiarise themselves with the political process, actors and issues.

This enables citizens make informed choices whenever they enter a polling booth to perform their civic duty.

It examines also how the Government acts to ensure free media access to political news sources and protect the media from harassment.

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The project was supervised by **Mr. Edetaen Ojo** MRA's Executive Director.

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The views expressed in the report do not necessarily represent the views of the USIS.

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1 INTRODUCTION

This is a pilot report of the Print Monitoring Project of Media Rights Agenda (MRA).

It is based on the monitoring of selected newspapers to assess the coverage of political issues during the period between December 1 and December 31, 1998.

This report focuses on the coverage of the political programme by three major independent national newspapers - *The Guardian*, *This Day* and the *Punch*. However, subsequent reports under this project will be more extensive in their scope.

The reports will focus on 10 daily newspapers and four weekly news magazines drawn from among independent and state-owned publications.

(a) BASIS OF MONITORING EXERCISE

The legal basis for fair and effective coverage of electoral processes lies in a variety of regional and international human rights instruments, particularly those provisions which protect the rights of peoples to freely choose their leaders and to receive information. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that:

The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of a government: This will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures¹

In a nutshell, this simply is Representative Democracy. This is more popularly defined as the government of the people, for the people and by the people which was coined by a former American President, Abraham Lincoln.

Other international instruments mirror and elaborate upon these rights. The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, for example, states that:

Every citizen shall have the right to freely participate in the government of his country, either directly or through freely chosen representatives in accordance with the provisions of the law²

1. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 21(3)) The Declaration was adopted and proclaimed by United Nations General Assembly Resolution 217 A(III) of December 10, 1998*
2. *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Article 13) The Charter was adopted by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) on June 27, 1981 and entered into force in October 1986*

On its part, the African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Government (ARUSHA 1990), also acknowledges that:

*.....popular participation is, in essence, the empowerment of the people to effectively involve themselves in creating the structures and designing policies and programmes that serve the interests of all as well as to effectively contribute to the development process and share equitably in the profits.*³

When citizens enter a polling booth to vote for the candidate of their choice, they are exercising one of their most fundamental rights. This right is guaranteed by a number of international human rights instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

In order to exercise this right fully, citizens must be able to meet, speak with, and listen to representatives, candidates and colleagues about community issues. The rights to assemble and associate freely are also protected by these same international human rights instruments.

Individuals, as potential voters, must be particularly well-informed during an election. Not only do they require information about the various candidates - their qualifications, opinions, voting records, and characters - but voters should also be familiar with the contending parties' platforms and policies. It stands to reason that in countries which do not have a long history of democratic elections, voters will need information about what the election is for and how to vote.

Gaining access to information during a campaign is an extension of the right of citizens to be well-informed and hold and express opinions about their governments' activities generally. These rights to information and free expression are also guaranteed by international instruments. For instance, Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that:

*Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.*⁴

3. *African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation (ARUSHA 1990) (Article 11).*

4. *Op cit (Article 19)*

To this end, the African Charter for Popular Participation for the mandated the national and regional media to

*...make every effort to fight for and defend their freedom at all cost, and make special effort to champion the cause of popular participation and publicize activities and programmes thereof and generally provide access for the dissemination of information and education programme on popular participation.*⁵

Even in stable democracies, there may be limitations on these rights. But these should be carefully conceived to protect democracy, not undermine it. Specifically, any restriction must be provided by law, relate to one of a small number of exceptions set out in the instrument guaranteeing the right and be necessary in a democratic society.

In certain instances limitations on these rights have been approved to maintain public order, protect privacy or ban communications that would promote religious, racial or national hatred.

To strengthen the rights to freedom of expression and information at the local level, the rights have been laid out in various regional human rights agreements. For instance, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights sets forth the principle that:

*Every individual shall have the right to receive information, ... [and] to express and disseminate his opinions within the law.*⁶

The Inter-American Convention on Human Rights guarantees the rights of individuals to freedom of thought and expression. Similarly, the European Convention on Human Rights guarantees that:

*Everyone has the right to freedom of expression... [including] freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers.*⁷

It is upon this sturdy foundation that the right to be informed and to hold and impart opinions during an election campaign is built.

5. *Quoted in Popular Participation In Development : Training Manual (1998) Human Rights Committee Justice, Development & Peace Commission - Ijebu Ode, Ogun State*

6. *Op cit (Article 9)*

7. *European Convention on Human Rights (Article 10). The instrument, also known as the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, was signed by contracting states of the council of Europe on November 4, 1950. It entered into force on September 3, 1953*

(b) FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

In order for a democracy to function, citizens must be able to make informed choices at the ballot box. To do this, they must have access to accurate and full information about the candidates, parties and issues. It is the duty of the government to ensure that an environment exists where facts, opinions and ideas can flow freely, where all sides of an argument can be heard and where debate is robust.

Government should also create an environment where the privately owned media can express a wide variety of opinions about the issues, parties and candidates. At the same time state-owned or publicly funded media must remain unbiased when collecting and disseminating information about the election.

During an election campaign, there are three sectors of society whose rights to information and free expression must be specially protected - potential voters, the news media and the various political forces.

The point is, therefore, made that incontestable as those acknowledgements are, an essential part of any functioning democracy, is the mass media; pluralistic and unrestrained. What is implied is that, Functional Democracy is best enhanced when all contesting points of views are being fairly and equitably communicated so that the people may make informed choices.

Secondly, apart from providing a vehicle for widely expressing contrasting and conflicting views, the media helps to moderate such views and as well, present them with appropriate decorum for palatable consumption. So that what the electorate get is not the raw and rough, and sometimes unguarded, utterances of politicians and others involved in the political process, but considerably watered down, polished and non-combustible views.

Thirdly, the media also monitors elections. In addition to reporting on the various processes and final results, the media investigate allegations of abuse, conduct pre-election polls, and establish mechanisms for quickly projecting and announcing election results.

Fourthly, the mass media provides an avenue for the governed to hold the government accountable and then, if they wish, change it. Simply put, therefore, media scrutiny is indispensable in achieving genuine participatory democracy.⁸

8. See Article 19: Election Reporting - A Practical Guide to Media Monitoring, (1998) pp 1-2

By this same fact, it goes without saying that any authority, be it the government or interest group, that can manipulate the mass media, will ultimately manipulate such an exercise as an election.

Nigeria is at this present time undergoing a political transition process which aims to usher in civilian democratic government after a decade and half of continuous military rule, and two failed attempts at transiting.

Determined this time to get it right emotions are decidedly high. At issue are:

Firstly, whether the military is sincerely disposed to go back to their barracks and face their constitutionally assigned role of territorial defence.

Secondly, whether the military has and does intend to foist its favoured candidate on the people.

Thirdly, the question is, anxious and suspicious as Nigerians are, is the press mature enough to be above board? Is it giving each political party free, equal and unhindered access to air their views, not minding the roles such parties / individuals might have played in previous dispensations?

Those, indeed, are the main focus of the Print Media Monitoring Project of Media Right Agenda.

(c) OBJECTIVES OF EXERCISE

- 1) To monitor the coverage by the print media of political and human rights issues in the run up to the presidential elections and until the transition programme comes to an end, to ascertain:
 - a. The extent of coverage given to political and human rights issues by state-owned and independent national newspapers and news magazines in terms of the space devoted to such issues, the kind of issues that are covered, as well as those left out and how comprehensively events relating to them are reported and analysed.
 - b. The pattern of reporting of events pertaining to government officials on state-owned newspapers such as the prominence given to them, allocation of space to opposition figures to provide different view-points from official positions.

- c. The fairness of allocation of news space to various political parties in relation to each other and relative to the space given to government officials in independent and state-owned newspapers and magazines, as well as how these impact on the political process.
- d. How much coverage is given to issues and events affecting rural and illiterate populations of the society.

2) To provide a barometer for the print media to measure their performance in reporting on human rights and political issues and undertake adjustments to bring themselves in conformity with international standards of fairness in the coverage of such issues.

3) To publish regular reports which will draw attention to patterns of inequitable reporting, inadequacy of political coverage, and provide a framework upon which a programme of reforms in the newspaper and magazine industries can be embarked upon.

4) To provide a basis upon which the in-coming democratically elected civilian government in Nigeria can undertake comprehensive legal and structural reforms in the regulation of newspapers and magazines in order to enhance the democratic process.

In a summary, the project aims at identifying the ways, manner and amount of coverage the print media is giving to the transition process and how disposed government is in assisting the media in this respect.

2 GENERAL CONSIDERATION FOR PRINT MEDIA MONITORING

There are two principal aspects that have been considered in this project. These are:

(a) Government

Considering the anxiety and suspicions of Nigerians regarding the sincerity of the military to relinquish power, analysis is made of governments' actions to determine its impartiality in conducting the political transition programme. This is specifically

in relation to government's actions, or its failures, to ensure the media's right to gather and impart information.

Also considered, is the media's ability to criticise activities or inaction of the government on matters relating to the transition process, to investigate corruption, bias and to operate independently of political pressures. This could be hindered by prior restraints, usually pursuant to laws on publication of materials concerning certain subjects.

Lastly, government's action or inaction to reports of persecution of journalists / publishers, or attacks on the press for performing legitimate professional duties. In a nut-shell, how the government acts to ensure the news media's right to gather and impart information and ideas.

We shall consider these in terms of the General and Legal Environment.

(b) The Press

Considering the role of the mass media in helping to ensure the enthronement and sustenance of democracy, the questions to be addressed shall include:

- (a) How the news media acts to provide access to political parties and candidates so that they may effectively communicate with the public during the political transition process.
- (b) How the media act to ensure fair and objective coverage of political parties and candidates in news and information reporting.
- (c) How the news media act to educate the electorate on how and why to vote.

3. ASSESSING HOW THE GOVERNMENT ACTS TO ENSURE FREE MEDIA ACCESS TO POLITICAL NEWS SOURCES AND PROTECTION FROM HARASSMENT

(a) General Environment

The mass media atmosphere in Nigeria is at the moment enjoying a breath of fresh air after a seemingly endless suffocating working environment that pervaded the media

industry during the regime of the late Head of State, General Sani Abacha.

Upon assumption of office last June, the head of state sought a hand of fellowship with the mass media. Chief among the approaches used was the release of journalists, jailed by the Abacha regime on charges of being “accessories after the fact of treason”, as well as the general ease in the hostilities directed at the press by the previous government.

This has led to healthy atmosphere for journalists in the practice of their profession.

(b) Legal Environment

In spite of the cessation of hostilities, as it were, caution continues to be the watchword for the media. Journalists and media workers still see too many landmines along their way. Just as the new Head of State, General Abdulsalami Abubakar, has eased the siege on the mass media and opened the prison doors to jailed journalists, he has retained the legal frame work and structures which made the practice of journalism under General Abacha the darkest period for the Nigerian media. The decrees employed for the arrest and detention of journalists as well as the violation of other media rights are still intact.

With the benefit of hindsight and past experiences, applying those decrees is discretionary for the head of state. Exercising that discretion does not require an elaborate plan. Just a change of mood by the head of state over a comment, question or remark, could trigger off a rash of arrest and detention in a few days.

Indeed, indications that the press truly need to be watchful was given recently when it was reported that a decree which bars live debate among political parties candidates, is on the way. According to *The Punch* newspaper in its issue of December 23, 1998, this indication was given by the Director General of the National Orientation Agency (NOA), Professor Elo Amucheazi.

Since the disclosure, government has not reacted to deny it. If, indeed, this is true, then the suspicion by Nigerians that the General Abubakar regime, like its forebearers, should not be trusted, is after all not taking pessimism to an absurd level.

For the press also, it also indicates that they may actually need a long spoon to dine with General Abubakar, late General Abacha’s number three man, and the present military ruler of Nigeria.

In the interim, however, a major legislation which threatens media freedoms in the coverage or criticism of the political transition programme, is the Transition to Civil Rule (Political Programme) Decree No. 1 of 1996.

Although, a creation of the regime of the late General Abacha, the decree remains in force to date, available for use at the government's discretion.

The decree stipulates a punishment of five (5) years imprisonment for any person who organises, plans, encourages, aids, cooperates or conspires with any other person to undermined, prevent or in any way do any act to forestall or prejudice the realisation of the political programme; "or any person who does or attempts to do any act to counsel, persuade, encourage, organise, mobilize, pressurize or threaten another person to join with him or with any other person or persons to misrepresent, accuse or distort the details, implications or purports of any item of the political programme".

The sweeping nature of the provisions, provides a wide latitude for the government or its officials to apply the decree in censoring media criticisms of the transition programme.

Another decree which directly threatens media freedom with regard to the transition programme is the Offensive Publications (Proscription) Decree No. 35 of 1993.

Promulgated by the government of General Ibrahim Babangida, the decree provides for the proscription, seizure and confiscation of any publication which, in the opinion of the head of state, is likely to:

- “(a) disrupt the process of democracy and peaceful transition to civil rule having regard to its contents; or
- (b) hinder or prevent the progress and process of the grassroot democracy as established by the transition to civil rule programme; or
- (c) disturb the peace and public order of Nigeria”

The decree ousts the jurisdiction of the courts to inquire into any question whether any of the fundamental rights provisions in the 1979 Constitution or the African Charter on Human and People's Rights has been violated by an order made pursuant to the provisions of the decree. It remains in force to date.

Other decrees which do not specifically restrict media access to political stories but restrict media freedoms generally, include:

1. The State Security (Detention of Persons) Decree No. 2 of 1984 (as amended), which allows for the indefinite and incommunicado detention, without charge or

trial, of any person perceived to threaten the security of the state;

2. The Constitution (Suspension and Modification) Decree No. 107 of 1993, which suspends a person's constitutional rights to compensation or public apology if he is found to have been unlawfully arrested or detained;

3. The Federal Military (Supremacy and Enforcement of Powers) Decree No.12 of 1994, which prohibits legal challenges to any military decree or to any action which violates the human rights provisions of the Constitution;

4. The Treason and Other Offences (Special Military Tribunal) Decree No. 1 of 1986, under which some journalists were convicted on the charge of being "accessories after the fact to treason" in the 1995 and 1997 alleged coup plots;

5. Treason and Treasonable Offences Decree No. 29 of 1993, which provides for a sentence of death to be imposed upon any person who utters any word, displays anything, or publishes any material which the military interprets as capable of breaking up Nigeria;

6. The Nigerian Press Council Decree No. 85 of 1992. Although touted as an avenue for those who feel maligned by the press to seek redress, its independence is compromised by the fact that the President has power to appoint the Chairman of the Council based on the recommendation of the Minister of Information. The presence in the Council of representatives of government controlled media such as the News Agency of Nigeria and the Nigerian Television Authority, and by the fact that it is government funded, all point to the likely possibility of lack of independence. All these facts have been reinforced by the fact that the Council has not moved to assert its authority when extra-legal measures are adopted by the government to repress the media.

7. The Newspapers Decree No. 43 of 1993 provides an equally grave threat to media freedom in Nigeria. This Decree provides for the establishment of a Newspaper Registration Board within the Ministry of Information. It requires that all newspapers are registered annually with the Board, which will then issue a licence to operate to registered newspapers and other publications. The cost of registration is extremely high. Newspapers have to pay a pre-registration deposit of N250,000 and a non-refundable fee of N100,000 annually. Failure by

the proprietor, publisher or printer to ensure that the newspaper is registered will lead to the closing down of the newspaper and criminal prosecution of the proprietor, publisher or printer. If convicted, they can be fined N250,000 or imprisoned for up to seven years or both. The Board may refuse to licence a newspaper if it is not satisfied with its “performance” during the previous year. But the Board is not obliged to give reasons for its refusal to register a newspaper. Although the Minister of Information announced recently that the Board has been disbanded, he was silent on the status of the enabling Decree.

8 The National Broadcasting Commission Decree No. 38 of 1992, which established a National Broadcasting Commission with powers to licence and supervise radio and television. Its lack of genuine independence from government can be seen from the fact that its members are government appointed and the fact that the decree empowers the minister of information “to give the Commission directives of a general character relating generally to particular matters with regard to the exercise by the Commission of its functions ...and it shall be the duty of the Commission to comply with such directives.” The Commission only recommends an application for radio or television licence to the minister of information who in turn recommends to the president on whom the power to grant or reject an approval lies. But it has powers to revoke or refuse to recommend an application for a licence where it is of the opinion that the body applying will not act or has not acted “to promote national interest, unity and cohesion”, a vague expression which gives room for politically motivated measures.

Beyond those, there are a lots of other repressive laws which gravely restrict freedoms of information and expression which lie buried in the statute books. There is the urgent need for the government to harmonize the Newspapers Ordinance Act of 1917, and the respective states newspaper laws regulating the printing of newspapers in the various states, as well as others which have their origin in the colonial period like the Sedition Offences Act (1909), the Official Secret Act of 1962, Defamation Act of 1961, and Defamatory and Offensive Publication Act of 1966.

Others are the Printing Presses (Regulation) Act of 1958 which gives the government unspecified powers to close down any printing press, the Wireless Telegraphy Act of 1961, the Obscene Publication Act of 1962; and the National Economic Intelligence

Committee (Establishment) Decree of 1994.

All the above considered, the only valid inference possible is that the government has not provided an enabling legal environment for unfettered media coverage of the transition process. The only reason why the press still performed as they did in spite of this obvious lapse, is because they have become all too familiar with working under an insecure atmosphere.

4 ASSESSING THE PRINT MEDIA AS IT ACTS TO GIVE EQUAL ACCESS TO POLITICAL PARTIES AND CANDIDATES, ENSURE FAIR COVERAGE, AND EDUCATE THE ELECTORATE ON HOW AND WHY TO VOTE.

In order to achieve the three sub-general considerations in print media monitoring, that is to answer how the media acts to provide access to political parties and candidates to air their views, ensure fair and objective coverage of their activities, and educate the electorate on how and why to vote, the following yardstick were used.

(a) Limitation

Due to logistics problems and to prevent a clumsy situation, the period to be covered by this project shall be six months i.e December, 1998 to May, 1999. The justification being that the period is expected to witness much political engineering in Nigeria's history.

In the same vein, rather than attempt monitoring print media focus on each and all the provisionally registered political parties, it has been decided that emphasis should be placed on only three. These are Alliance for Democracy (AD), All People's Party (APP) and People's Democratic Party (PDP)

The selection of these parties was arrived at after a careful consideration of their national spread, organisational structure, personalities involved and other characteristics which stand them in better stead.

(b) Variables

Finally, the variables that shall hold our interest shall include :

(1) Stories on Government Activities

Here, we shall look at stories generated from activities of government

officials at the local government, state and federal levels. Their conducts, pronouncements and other activities bordering on the transition programme. Also to be included here shall be activities of government agencies such as the police.

(2) Stories on INEC

This shall include stories generated directly from the activities of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). For example, if INEC calls a press conference and in the process gives out a list of candidates cleared for an election, this is categorised as a publication on INEC. But where the impression is created that rather than such list been given out by INEC, the newspaper obtained it by itself and published same, this is taken as a Civic Education.

(3) Stories on A. D

Included here are stories generated from A.D's activities; press conferences, meetings, campaigns and others. Also are comments by party members on their party members, other parties and issues.

(4) Stories on APP

This shall include stories generated from APP's activities; press conferences, campaigns, meetings and other issues. Also are comments by party members on their party members, other parties and issues.

(5) Stories on PDP

Similarly, this shall include stories generated from PDP's activities; press conferences, campaigns, meetings and other issues. Also, are comments by party members on their party members, other parties and issues.

(6) Stories on Two Parties or The Three Combined

Included here are stories generated by two or all the three parties (AD, APP and PDP) and written together.

(7) Informed Commentaries

Treated here are stories which may be related to activities of INEC, AD, PDP, APP and other issues relating to the transition process, but which are, however, not necessarily treated as news items, but as features stories. Also included are newspaper editorials, opinion page comments, analysis and letters to the editor.

(8) Civic Education

This relates to publications that are meant to educate the citizens on important

aspects of the transition programme and why they should participate. For example where a newspaper on its own goes ahead to obtain and publish a document such as the list of candidates cleared for an election by INEC without an indication that it was given out by INEC, at say a press conference, such is taken as a Civic Education. So also are news stories or features that explain the procedure for party registration, the electoral decrees etc.

(9) **Advertisement**

This is sub-divided into three alongside the three provisionally registered political parties on which we have chosen to focus the monitoring for the month under review. The advert could be placed by the party or any of its member.

(10) **Others**

These consist of publications on all other provisionally registered political parties. Also included are stories on comments by, and activities of bodies and persons outside the aforementioned groups of persons and interest groups in the transition process.

(11) **Total number of Stories**

This shall simply be all the above added together. In addition to all the above, the total available print space shall be determined.

The newspapers that shall be monitored for this exercise shall include:

1. *The Guardian*
2. *This Day*
3. *The Punch*
4. *Daily Times*
5. *Vanguard*
6. *Champion*
7. *Nigerian Tribune*
8. *Sketch*
9. *The New Nigerian*
10. *The Diet*

The following magazines shall equally be monitored.

1. *Tell*
2. *The News*
3. *The Source*
4. *Newswatch*

However, only the following three newspapers have been monitored under this pilot exercise:

1. *The Guardian*
2. *This Day*
3. *The Punch*

A monthly report is expected to be published throughout the duration of the exercise.

5. PRESENTATION OF RESULT FOR DECEMBER 1998

(i) *The Guardian*

	Variables	No. of Stories	Pages
1.	Stories on Government	45	9.92
2.	Stories on INEC	44	8.26
3.	Stories on AD	43	7.63
4.	Stories on APP	39	9.43
5.	Stories on PDP	56	13.83
6.	Parties combined	38	13.9
7.	Informed Commentaries	89	13.9
8.	Civic Education	19	7.62
9.	Advertisement		
	AD	0	0
	APP	1	6
	PDP	8	8
10.	Others	61	8.66
11.	Total Nos of Pol. Stories	443	133.7

Formula:

No. of Pages = Total space in inches Sq

1 page in inches sq (145 inches sq)

i.e stories on Govt. = $\frac{1445.48}{145} = 9.92$ Pages

145

Other relevant formation

Technical Details

Full page = 10inches x 14.5 inches

= 145 inches Sq

Total number of pages published by *The Guardian* for the month of December 1998 = 1608.

Total number of 1 page devoted to political stories and issues for the month of December 1998 = 133.7.

i.e - 8.3%

(ii) *This Day*

	Variables	No. of Stories	Pages
1.	Government	22	
2.	INEC	24	
3.	A D	48	
4.	APP	51	
5.	PDP	90	
6.	Parties Combined	17	
7.	Informed Commentaries	83	
8.	Civic Education	48	
9.	AD	0	0
	APP	6	17
	PDP	17	22.5 39.5
10.	Others	29	
11.	Total No. of Pol. Stories	436	167

Other relevant information

Technical Details

Full page - 14.3 inches x 10.5 inches

= 151 inches sq

The total number of pages published by *This Day* for the month of December 1998 was 1094

Total number of pages devoted to political stories and issues for the month of December 1998 was 167

i.e 15%

(iii) *The Punch*

	Variables	Nos of Stories	Pages	
1.	Government	16		
2.	INEC	13		
3.	A D	42		
4.	APP	44		
5.	PDP	48		
6.	Parties Combined	9		
7.	Informed Commentaries	40		
8.	Civic Education	30		
9.	AD	1	1	
	APP	2	2	
	PDP	8	8	14
10.	Others	30		
11.	Total No. of Pol. Stories	283		105

Other relevant information

Technical Details

Full - page 103inches x 14inches

= 144inches sq

The total number of pages published by *The Punch* for the month of December 1998 was 992

Total number of pages devoted to political stories and issues for the month of December 1998 was 105 i.e. 10.6%

6 INTERPRETATION

(i) *The Guardian*

During the month under review, *The Guardian* published a total of 1608 pages of newspaper. Of this, 133.5 pages were devoted to political issues pertaining to the transition. This is made up of 443 stories.

Of this total number of pages, 10 pages were on stories pertaining to government. It is made up of 45 stories.

Similarly, INEC got approximately eight pages from 44 stories. Others are: AD, nine and half pages from 43 stories; APP, eight pages from 39 stories, and PDP, 14 pages from 56 stories.

For stories combining two or all the three parties (AD, APP and PDP), *The Guardian*, devoted 38 articles spread over 14 pages. Informed Commentaries got 40 pages from 89 mention and Civic Education, 19 stories over 7.5 pages.

Advertisement accounted for 14 pages in nine separate placements. Of this, APP had six, PDP eight, and AD none.

Other interest groups got 8.5 pages from 61 stories.

(ii) *This Day*

This Day published a total of 1094 pages for the month of December, 1998. Of this, a total of 167 pages were devoted to political issues in a total of 436 stories

In the same period, a total number of 27 stories were devoted to government, 24 stories to INEC, 48 stories to AD, 51 stories to APP, 90 stories to PDP, 17 stories to Parties Combined, 83 stories to Informed Commentaries; 80 stories to Civic Education, 23 to Advertisement placement; and 29 stories to "Others."

(iii) *The Punch*

The Punch published a total of 992 pages for the month of December 1998. Of this, 105 pages were devoted to political issues in a total of 283 stories.

In the same period, a total number of 16 stories were devoted to Government, 13 stories to INEC, 42 stories to AD, 44 stories to APP, 48 stories to PDP, nine stories to

Parties Combined, 40 stories to Informed Commentaries, 30 stories to Civic Education, 11 Adverts and 32 stories to “Others”.

7. ANALYSIS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

(i) Analysis

After a careful study of the above data, several significant inferences can be made.

First, in relation to how the government acts to ensure that the news media gather and impart information and ideas, it is noted that there was a general air of press freedom. This is considered in relation to the absence of deliberate attempts by the government to stop the press from performing its function.

But two very important things are worth monitoring here. First, the government has not deemed it fit to give legal protection to journalists in the general performance of their professional duties or with regard to the coverage of the political transition programme which would have been necessary to disabuse the minds of Nigerians who generally think that in spite of the professed genuine intentions, government is nonetheless sympathetic towards one of the political parties. This suspicion was re-enforced by the fact that the head of state and other top government functionaries, voted during the Local Government Election

Secondly, the fact that various legislation, decrees and edicts which restrict press freedom still exist, counts for a minus. This is in spite of the expressed hand of fellowship extended to mass media practitioners by the head of state.

On the part of the press, it was difficult to determine, for example, how the media acts to provide access to political parties and candidates to communicate to the public.

This is more so because though some parties got more mention than the others, it was obviously not possible to determine if a party or some parties were deliberately denied access to communicate to the public.

However, on the issues of how the media acts to ensure fair and objective coverage of political parties, if the mere number of mention is anything to go by, then some parties were more favoured than others.

The PDP, for example, got a total of 56 exclusive mentions in *The Guardian*, while AD got 43 and APP, 39. Between AD and APP, on one hand and PDP on the other, the difference is quite significant.

But on its parts, *The Punch* gave 42 exclusive mentions to AD; APP, 44 and PDP,

48, which is highly proportional and with no significant difference.

But *This Day* presented a very different picture. While it gave APP 51 exclusive mentions, it gave PDP 90. This almost doubled the AD's 48.

Across the papers, the exclusive mentions are in similar neighbourhood. The only exception is *This Day*'s mention of PDP which at 90, stands way out of others.

In the area of Informed Commentaries, while *The Guardian* and *This Day* stand toe-to-toe as per the number of exclusive mention by them which are 84 and 83, respectively, *The Punch* lags quite behind as it gave 40 mentions in this regard.

A very important variable is Civic Education. As stated above, this considers publications originated by the newspapers, not necessarily prompted by any political activity, meant to explain issues concerning the transition / election process and why people should vote.

The Guardian devoted 19 stories for this purpose. This is rather on the low side compared to the 48 stories devoted to it by *This Day* and *The Punch* newspaper's 40 stories. The difference between *This Day* and *The Punch* newspaper's - eight pages - is considered significant. But even more so is that between *This Day* and *The Punch* on one hand, and *The Guardian* on other. *The Punch* and *This Day* each published more Civic Education stories than *The Guardian* with over 100 and 140 percent, respectively.

Another significant development in the data worthy of note is the advertisements. It must be acknowledged that how many of such that a newspaper publishes is a function of the decision of the political parties. Therefore, in considering the data in relation to Advertisement, the onus of access is to be placed at the door steps of the parties. The influence of the newspapers would have been considered if it were possible to determine whether newspapers could, or did, indeed, reject advertisement placements by any or all of the parties.

In this regard, therefore, the data indicate that the parties, between them, published 14 full pages of adverts in *The Guardian*. Of this, PDP had eight full pages published separately and on different dates. The APP on its part had six full pages published in one day as a single advert. AD had none.

Between them also, the parties published 29.5 pages of adverts in *This Day*. While PDP had the upper hand with 22 full pages and one half page published separately in 17 placements and on different dates, APP had 17 full pages published in six placements.

Coming last of the considered variables is published stories which fall outside all

the above considered variables. They are dubbed as ‘Others’

The Guardian published 61 of such stories while *This Day* and *The Punch* published 29 and 30, respectively. While it can be seen that *The Punch* and *This Day* are at par in this area, *The Guardian* published a 100 percent more stories than the other two in what seem to be making up for its deficiency with respect to Civic Education.

Finally, the total political stories published by *The Guardian*, *The Punch* and *This Day* stood at 443,280 and 436, respectively. This also covered for the three newspapers, 133.7, 167 and 105 pages, respectively. This is relative to their monthly total page run of 1603 for *The Guardian*, 992 for *The Punch* and 1094 for *This Day*.

(ii) Conclusion

Clearly, we affirm that there was no substantiated evidences of biased reporting in favour of any of the political parties on the part of any of the newspapers monitored.

Though, there were a few instances when we considered some stories as flavoured, to suit specific political and economic interests, we were constrained not to take those as conclusive evidences of bias reporting for the main fact that such flavouring was not continued overtime.

However, in drawings conclusion from the data as to why, for example ,one newspaper gave more mention to one issue than the other, a lot of possibilities exist. Among possible influencing factors are, the political bent of a particular newspaper. This is often influenced by the ownership structure. For example, *The Guardian* is seen more as a conservative and largely apolitical newspaper which is more likely to permit uninhibited access from various contending parties. The paper is more devoted to serving as a market place of ideas, and providing interpretations to events so as to lead and influence public opinion.

This can perhaps explain why it devoted more pages and stories to Informed Commentaries than other variables. That it gave so little attention to Civic Education than the other newspapers, is a cause for worry. This is especially so because the paper, known to circulate to every nook and cranny of the country, could have immensely assisted in educating the populace on the need to be actively involved in the transition process.

This Day comes close to *The Guardian* as it almost equalled the latter in Informed Commentaries. But it clearly surpassed *The Guardian* in the area of Civic Education. This is most encouraging bearing in mind that, traditionally, while *The Guardian* is seen more as an intellectual newspaper, *This Day* is more business oriented. *The Punch* which is seen more as a mass appeal newspaper reported to be Nigeria's most widely read, and that could have devoted more attention to Civic Education, sadly failed in this respect.

In the area of attention to the parties, while the differences in the attention the papers accorded AD and APP is not significant between them on one hand, but between them on one hand and PDP on the other, it is significant. This is noticed in all three newspapers.

Possible explanations are that:

1. PDP has more spread and hence likely to generate more news around the country;
2. Some personalities in the PDP by their antecedents and conduct during the month under review generated more news stories than personalities in other parties;
3. The fact that PDP had a land slide victory in the December 5 Local Government Election resulted in more focus on it and;
4. The influence of money.

This last point is supported by the fact that of the 67.5 pages of adverts placed in all three newspapers combined, PDP's as a party and its candidates, accounted for 41.5 which is over 60 percent. APP had 25 pages representing 37 percent and AD one page representing 1.5, less than 2 percent.

Other areas worthy of note is the attention given to INEC and the Government. *The Guardian* clearly has an upper hand here. It published twice as many stories on INEC and the Government than did *This Day* and *The Punch*.

On the whole, there is a more even spread in the attention given by *The Guardian* to the various variables in the transition process than *This Day* and *The Punch*.

Notes:

- (a) We note with satisfaction that the three parties shortlisted for this project were the three eventually registered by INEC.

(b) We note that this report falls short of giving a definitive value judgement as to which paper positively or negatively publicised any of our given variables. This is based on a few logistic problems. This very important aspect will, however, receive a closer attention in subsequent reports.

Error Margin

We admit an error margin of plus or minus 5 in data collection.

(iii) Recommendations

* The Government should create a more conducive legal environment for media coverage of the transition programme by repealing all laws and decrees which inhibit the capacity of the media to report freely.

In particular, the Government should revoke its reported ban on live debates.

* The Government should provide adequate protection for journalists and media workers against intimidation and attacks by thugs, supporters and members of political parties or candidates. The government should also investigate into all reported cases and prosecute those responsible.

* There was a reported low turn-out of voters recorded during the December 5, Local Government Polls, blamed largely on lack of awareness on the part of eligible voters on the need to avail themselves of this civic duty, and where to vote. We recommend, therefore, that the print media should improve significantly on their focus on Civic Education publications.

Following from the above, we recommend that the government and INEC should give more attention to political enlightenment programmes both in the mass media and using informal traditional means especially in rural areas where newspapers do not circulate and illiteracy is high.

* A further recommendation is that the newspapers, rather than increase their advert rates, as they have done, should reduce it to enable parties and politicians have more access to the electorate.

The fact that AD could only place one advert while PDP and APP had 41.5 and 25, respectively, is not likely because it (AD) does not see the need to advertise. Rather it is more likely that the costs scared AD and its members.



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 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.

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