

Airwaves Scorecard

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



April 1999

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

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PREFACE

This report is the fourth in the series of the Broadcast Monitoring Project being 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 regardless of 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.

This report focuses on the coverage of the political programme by four television and two radio stations.

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1 INTRODUCTION

This is the fourth report of the Broadcast Media Monitoring Project of Media Rights Agenda (MRA). It is based on the monitoring of selected broadcast media to assess their coverage of political issues during the period between March 1 and March 31, 1999.

This report focuses on the coverage of political programmes by four television and two radio stations.

The Television stations are:

1. The Federal Government-owned Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), in Abuja.
2. The Federal Government-owned Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), in Kaduna.
3. Privately-owned African Independent Television (AIT) in Lagos.
4. Private-owned MiNAJ Systems Television in Obosi, Anambra State.

The radio stations are:

1. The Federal Government-owned Radio Nigeria in Abuja
2. Privately-owned Ray Power 100.5 F.M in Lagos.

(a) BASIS OF MONITORING EXERCISE

A full discussion of this can be found in the pilot report under this project published in January 1999¹. In that report, it was established that the basis of media monitoring and report on electoral exercises is founded on a variety of regional and international human rights instruments as well as a social obligation. This ensures that citizens make informed choices whenever they participate in an electoral process.

That report also showed that guidelines may be issued for the media on the coverage of elections in order to maintain public order, protect privacy or bar communications that would promote religious, racial or national hatred.

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

(b) FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

A fuller discourse on the issue can also be found in the pilot report under this project. In that report the point was made that 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 view points are being fairly and equitably communicated so that the people may make informed choices.

Specifically, it was noted that, the prime place of television and radio as political mobilisation is incontestable. Television, with its visual effect, can create the most potent images and emotion. Radio is especially important in a country such as Nigeria, where illiteracy is high, where newspapers do not circulate beyond major towns and where television is not widely available because of poor electricity supply and the high cost of television set.

Even in the poorest of countries, most rural families will have access to portable radios and have sufficient funds to buy batteries.

(c) **LEGAL BOUNDARIES OF ELECTION REPORTING IN NIGERIA**

Broadcast Media

The domestic legislation and other provisions, which regulate the coverage of elections and politics, are directed principally at the broadcast media. This is, perhaps, understandable, considering the widely held view that radio and television remain the most effective means of mass communication in Africa having regard to the high level of poverty and illiteracy.²

The Political Parties (Registration and Activities) Decree No. 35 of 1998 gives radio and television the function of assisting members of the public in partaking of all ideas, ideals and experiences that help them live in a society that is humane and democratic. It requires that such radio and television programmes should influence members of the public to make living in society orderly and disciplined.

Under the Decree, radio and television are also to assist and sensitize Nigerians in making the right political choices, which will help in bringing into being a good and accountable government.

Other functions of radio and television under the Decree include: to foster political awareness among the political parties in Nigeria; to enlighten the public on the political provisions of the Nigerian Constitution; to promote public interest and consciousness in participatory politics; to educate Nigerians on their rights and political duties; and to encourage the evolution of broad political fronts based on national ideals and choices rather than on ethnic or other prejudices.

The Decree enjoins radio and television stations to provide a forum for competing ideas and ideals to be traded freely and publicly.

The National Broadcasting Code states the political objectives of broadcasting in Nigeria thus:

“Broadcasting shall contribute to the development of national unity and participatory democracy. Therefore, the political objectives of Broadcasting shall be to:

- (i) create and promote political awareness amongst the people to achieve a democratic society;
- (ii) inculcate in the people the spirit of tolerance of all shades of opinion; and
- (iii) promote social justice based on the responsibilities and rights of the individual in society.”³

The second schedule to Decree No. 35 of 1998 contains guidelines on political campaigns through electronic media. The Decree also contains guidelines for programming and debates on radio and television.

The Decree requires radio and television stations to allot time equally to political parties and candidates to market themselves. It also stipulates that the rates for commercials charged political parties should be the same.

It states that political party broadcasts should not exceed one hour per week per station, at pre-election times, or 30 minutes per week at other times. The duration of party talk is also limited to about 10 minutes, and preferably not more than 15 minutes.

The Decree stipulates that the sale of airtime like jingles should not exceed 60 seconds and that no voice of a member of staff of the radio or television station is to be used in political jingles.

¹ See *Airwaves Scorecard: Report of the Broadcast Media Coverage of the Political Transition Programme – January 1999*

The National Broadcasting Code outlines “the minimum standard to be observed by all operators of radio and television stations” in Nigeria⁴. As part of these standards, it provides extensive guidelines for political coverage.⁵ Besides the broad parameters laid out in the preamble in this area, the guidelines also relate specifically to live coverage, news interviews and discussion programmes.

The Code contains a range of sanctions, which may be imposed on a station for any breach of the guidelines contained in it. These include the revocation of its license, if it commits a serious breach of either the technical or non-technical aspects of the Code; reprimand or warning; light or heavy fine; reduction of broadcast hours or suspension of license, depending on the gravity of the offence.

The Code requires all political programmes to observe the provisions of extant Acts, Decrees and electoral laws. All stations are obliged to adhere strictly to the rules given by the electoral body.

It also provides that political party broadcasts, which it describes as programmes over which content political parties exercise control, should be only those in which the parties seek to explain their views and policies.

All political broadcasts are required to be in “decent language” and to be clearly identified as political broadcasts which should not be presented in a manner that would mislead the audience to believe that the programme is of any other character.

The Code stipulates that equal opportunity and airtime should be provided to all political parties or views, with particular regard to the amount of time and belt.

It seeks to regulate the conduct of broadcast producers by stipulating that “while a broadcast producer may interact with politicians in the course of his duties, this interaction shall not be such as to lead to the belief that he is either a member or sympathizer of any political party”

It gives every station the responsibility to produce and report the activities in the political arena in news and programmes, and requires such production to be objective and fair. Panelists must also be of comparable status.

The objective of news and programmes, under the Code, shall be to promote public discussion of political issues.

For live coverage, the Code stipulates in Paragraph 4.5 generally that live coverage of public events should be fair and balanced. But specifically, it stipulates that: “The live coverage of public events, especially of demonstrations and disturbances, shall be fair and balanced and just enough for the enlightenment of the citizenry. It shall not sensationalise or glamorise the event or exploit broadcasting’s unique advantages to the detriment of national interest and security.”

With regard to news interviews, the Code requires that all such programmes should be guided by ethical standards of journalism and imposes on the station an obligation to state during the broadcast when a news interview excludes an important or newsworthy area of the issue under discussion.

Besides, the Code states, where an interview entails an agreement to submit questions in advance or to exclude an important or newsworthy area concerning the subject, or where further developments have taken place after the recording, this should be stated at the beginning of the broadcast.

For discussion programmes, panelists are required to reflect the various viewpoints and to be of comparable status.

The Code also imposes an obligation on the station to state at the beginning of the broadcast where a discussion excludes any important or newsworthy area, or where further developments have taken place after the recording.

The Code also contains guidelines on the broadcast of political advertisements.⁶ It prohibits the commercialization of political news or coverage in the interest of fairness and balance and to prevent the monetization of political broadcasts.

It stipulates that no advertisement, including commercial news, shall be accepted in a political programme and requires the advertiser to be clearly identified in all advertisements.

The Code also stipulates that “no advertisement shall contain anything which amounts to subversion of constituted authority or compromises the unity, sovereignty and corporate existence of Nigeria as a secular state.”

(d) OBJECTIVES OF EXERCISE

The objectives remain as stated in the previous reports. These include to monitor the coverage by the broadcast media of political and human rights issues during the political transition programme in Nigeria, to ascertain whether:

- a. There re guidelines for direct-access programming laid down by the Electoral Commission
- b. The type of direct-access programming being aired
- c. The programmes are live or taped
- d. The programmes include “ actuality” - recordings of the candidates in their own words and voices
- e. The programmes allow candidates and parties to explain their platforms and views
- f. The programmes give voters the opportunity to form opinion about the character of each candidate, their platform sand parties
- g. All the parties and candidates have equal time and similar programme formats
- h. The parties’ programmes are aired at similar times during the day
- i. The broadcasting slot is given free of charge
- j. Airtime is paid for, and whether it can be said that no discounts were given to specific parties
- k. There are arbitrary restrictions on the format of the materials

Further, the objectives include:

- l) To provide a barometer for the broadcast 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.
- m) 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 broadcast industry can be embarked upon.
- n) 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 broadcast stations in order to enhance the democratic process.

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

2 GENERAL CONSIDERATION FOR BROADCAST MEDIA MONITORING

As was the case with the previous reports under this project, there are two principal aspects that have been considered in this report. 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 broadcasting of materials concerning certain subjects.

Lastly, government's action or inaction to reports of persecution of broadcasters / proprietors of broadcast stations, or attacks on the media for performing legitimate professional duties. In a nutshell, how the government acts to ensure the news media's right to gather and impart information and ideas. This shall all combine to answer the objectives number "1", "11" and "14".

These will be considered in terms of the General and Legal Environment.

(b) The Broadcast Media

Having regard to the objectives of this exercise as outlined above, and considering the fact that developments in the political arena have gone beyond electioneering politicking, and considering the role of the broadcast media in helping not just to ensure the enthronement but also the sustenance of democracy, considerations for monitoring the broadcast media have been slightly altered with respect to hitherto german issues. The consideration for broadcast media monitoring for this report include:

- (a) How the broadcast media reports on allegations of electoral fraud and generates investigative reports and discourse thereof.
- (b) How the broadcast media reports on issues of accountability in governance and generates discourse in this regard.
- (c) How the broadcast media perceives and reports on loyal opposition.
- (d) How the broadcast media reports on issues regarding post-election democratic development and generates discourse in this regard.

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

It is noted that a conducive general broadcast media environment prevailed during the month under review. The situation remained same as was the case in the months of December 1998 to February 1999. But the legal environment as noted in the January⁷ report under this project was still filled with land mines. There has been no reprieve for the broadcast media. While most of the legal land mines that dot the way of the broadcast media may be considered laws for the shop only, being that they have been in existence for years without their being put to use, nothing has been done with respect to the provisions of Decree No. 35 of 1998 which greatly limits the performance of the broadcast media by its restriction on the airtime allocation. This was discussed in the March report.⁸

4 ASSESSING THE BROADCAST MEDIA AS IT GENERATES AND REPORTS ON ALLEGATIONS OF ELECTORAL FRAUD, ACCOUNTABILITY IN GOVERNANCE, LOYAL OPPOSITION AND POST-ELECTION DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT

Naturally, since the focus is on daily broadcast monitoring and is on going, there are obviously new developments to report. However, while the limitations set at the beginning of this exercise remain unchanged, the variables which hitherto formed the basis of the focus and analysis, have been altered.

This is as a result of the shift of the broadcast media focus to other areas due to the conclusion of the elections slated to take place during this transition programme. These are identified and defined hereunder.

(a) Limitations

The period to be covered by this exercise remains six months, from December 1998, to May 1999, when the transition programme is expected to have been completed. However, this report focuses on the monitoring of the broadcast media in the month of March 1999.

In order to assess the broadcast media on the above considerations, the following variables were taken into consideration.

(b) Variables

The variables and issues that we shall focus on during the monitoring exercise will include:

(1) Reports on Allegations of Electoral Fraud

Considered here are how the various broadcast stations monitored reported on and treated allegations of electoral fraud by politicians and parties. The questions addressed include whether such allegations of electoral fraud

were treated lightly or seen as a serious matter capable of undermining the credibility of the transition process and hence deserving proper scrutiny?

Or whether such allegations of electoral fraud though seen as having serious implications on the political transition programme, were downplayed because they also are a matter capable of providing an excuse for ambitious military officers to use as a pretext to truncate the transition programme?

(2) Reports on Accountability in Governance

Considered here are how the various broadcast stations monitored reported on and treated pronouncements on accountability in governance by politicians and political parties.

The questions addressed include whether the broadcast stations monitored reported such pronouncements with deserving seriousness or with skepticism, either because of the antecedents of the politicians or parties making such comments or as a result of a lingering doubt, due to the seeming incredulous nature of Nigerians owing to the mind bogging allegations and proven cases of corruption in government? Also considered are programmes by the broadcast stations on ensuring accountability in governance.

(3) Reports on Loyal Opposition

Treated here are cases of how the broadcast stations reported comments of opposition parties and politicians in the political arena. Knowing that an essential bench mark of democratic evolution is checks and balances provided by various bodies and institutions, amongst them the minority parties, the question to be addressed is how do the broadcast stations treat opposing views by opposition parties and politicians?

Does the treatment connote one of a constitutional right on the part of the party(ies) or politician(s) taking opposing position or one of a spoiler?

(4) Reports on Post-Election Democratic Development

Considered here are reports and programmes which aim directly to strengthen or weaken post-election democratic development or, indirectly, reports and programmes by the broadcast stations which emanate from the activities of government and political parties with respect to strengthening the development of democratic institutions.

For example, how did the broadcast stations react to and report on cases of legal recourse by candidates and parties, which lost elections? Knowing that due legal process and the rule of law are an integral part of democracy, did the broadcast stations see and report those as a basic test of democracy or did they perceive and report such as capable of weakening the democratic process?

How are the broadcast stations reporting and generating programmes with respect to how the government is preparing for the success of the in-coming civilian administration? This is viewed both in terms of training of

personnel that will work with the civilians and giving legal backing to the various stages of the transition process already concluded as well as the promulgation of the Constitution which is to be the guide rule for governance for the envisaged civilian democracy?

(5) Others

These consist of all other reports and programmes having political references which, however, could not be grouped under the aforementioned variables

5. ABOUT THE TELEVISION AND RADIO STATIONS MONITORED FOR THIS REPORT:

As noted in the March report, the coverage given by a particular radio / television station to the political transition programme as a whole and the various variables listed above, will sometimes be a function of the economic, political and ideological bent of such a radio / television station.

This, itself, is also likely to be a function of the ownership / administrative structure of the radio / television station, target audience as well as its basic philosophy. In this wise, a few words on the ownership structure, target audience and philosophy of the radio / television stations monitored, were published in the February report.¹⁰

A reproduction of this is not considered necessary.

6. PRESENTATION OF RESULT OF THE BROADCAST MEDIA MONITORING FOR THE MONTH OF MARCH 1999.

The month of March is considered as perhaps the most anxious month in all of the transition months. This is so because it was the month when legal contestations of the presidential election result which held on February 27, 1999, peaked.

Mass media organisations all did their best to present the proceedings in the courts in non-partisan and sensational manner which could inflame passion and tension. An examination of this is presented hereunder .

(i) African Independent Television (AIT)

On the March 1, INEC Chairman Justice Akpata announced General Olusegun Obasanjo's election as the president. On March 2, General Obasanjo's world press conference was aired. This was given impressive coverage by AIT as it was on air for about 2 hours with generous use of actuality. Also, the station relayed the news report on Yobe State's constitution of its transition committee and Lagos State governor-elect, Senator Bola Tinubu's appeal to Lagosians to shun violence over the result of the presidential election. There was also a broadcast of INEC Chairman's advice that anyone dissatisfied with the election result should seek redress in the courts.

The edition of *Issues in Democracy* aired on March 3, was a civic education issue which dealt on the role of a new democratic Nigeria in the West African sub-region and the international community. Two foreign observers were interviewed and they both agreed that, democratic Nigeria was of great importance not only to African States, but the rest of the world.

AIT news feature programme tagged: *Searchlight*, of Saturday March 6, was quite informal and examined the expectations of Nigerians from General Obasanjo and members of the public were interviewed on the issue. The broadcast was quite balanced as some of the people interviewed expected that General Obasanjo would solve some of the country's problems while others believed he was only making promises he would not keep. The presenter left it all to the public without interjecting his own opinion.

The only political news report on March 9, was the set-up of a committee to organise a "befitting reception" for the Head of State and the Chief of General Staff after the hand-over on May 29.

On March 10, Jesse Jackson's visits to Chief Olu Falae and General Olusegun Obasanjo were comprehensively reported and the reports were balanced in actuality and duration.

Two editions of *Democracy Today* were aired during the month of March. The edition of March 14 focused on the Obafemi Awolowo Foundation annual lecture and the dispute over the presidential election, while that of March 28, was wholly on the Appeal Court proceedings.

The news bulletin of March 14 through 20, continued with reports on the world tour of the president-elect.

On March 22, the legal tussle over the presidential election began and the station gave a comprehensive, balanced and easy-to-understand report of the proceedings in the Court.

As from March 18, it was observed that political stories on the station's bulletin had reduced a great deal and the regular political stories were on the court proceedings and the world tour of the president-elect, General Obasanjo.

The March 24 edition of *Issues in Democracy*, the last of the two aired in that month, gave an analysis of the court proceedings on the presidential elections.

AIT during the month under review introduced a new International network news programme called AINET. It is a 30-minute news package devoted only to African and International news, although political stories on Nigeria were reported scantily. Political interviews on *Kaakaki* the station's early morning programme, reduced during the month under review. Besides, most of the political news bulletins were read without headlines and briefly too, compared to the previous months.

But the station did not feature any programme where it analysed cases of opposition in the political arena. All the station did was to report such cases without any opinion, comment or analysis. The correspondents mainly reported the facts and left the viewers to make their own conclusions.

(ii) Radio Nigeria, Abuja

Coverage of the transition programme on FRCN network started on March 1 with the news of a press conference addressed by INEC Chairman, Justice Akpata. There was a rehash of already received results announced the previous day which showed the PDP leading. It also carried AD member, Ayo Opadokun's comment at INEC collation center, that the results were outrageous. But the station played down international observers'

negative comment. Later in the day there was a report of the announcement of the election result by INEC Chairman.

On March 2, there was a report on handing-over committees reports to the CGS as well as of the president-elect speaking on his vision for Nigeria.

On March 3, the political programme, *Platform*, focused on the president-elect's vision for Nigeria. The network news covered the Head of State's inspection of projects connected with the transition programme. The Edo State Military Administrator did the same in the state. The news bulletin also broadcast a civic education analysis on the politics of development.

On March 4, INEC issued a certificate of election to General Obasanjo and this was reported by the station. There was a news analysis on impediments to democracy.

On March 5, the CGS endorsed the transition programme. The vice president-elect called on Nigerians to support the next government. Senator-elect, Alhaji Idris Abulaller, called for a vibrant legislative house. These were also reported by the station.

A two-hour live programme, *Radio link*, aired on March 6, featured two PDP stalwarts, Mr. Aniete Okon and Dr. Patrick Cole, who answered callers' questions and spoke of their party's determination to succeed

Between March 6 and 10, there were stories on Jesse Jackson's endorsement of the transition programme and a news report that the election petition tribunal had thrown-out the election petition against the governor-elect of Imo State. Oyo State governor-elect was also reported to have pledged commitment to restructuring and privatisation.

Also there was a news item on AD chieftains' meeting on why Chief Olu Falae should go to court. *Platform* featured Dr. Cole who dwelt on the futility of Falae's court action. Also, there was a report the women's council asking for a 5 per cent slot for women in appointments.

Between March 11 and 14, the station featured Chief Falae on *Platform*, explaining why he went to court and INEC Secretary spoke on preparations for bye-elections in 18 states.

On March 15, the station's news bulletin featured APP Chairman's reaction to criticisms of his visit to the president-elect in Ota. It also featured INEC Secretary's announcement of the beginning of screening for bye-election candidates. While the president-elect called for support at the by-election, Professor Wole Soyinka described the election as an auction show. In *Platform*, speakers questioned the mode and practice of federalism in Nigeria

On March 16, the station reported Prof. Wole Soyinka saying that Falae's action was in support of democracy. There was a news analysis on the challenges before the incoming civilian administration.

Between the March 17 and 19, there were reports of the CGS calling on civil servants to brace up for democratic governance. It also reported that Chief Falae had been granted an ex-parte motion by the Court of Appeal and that another court restrained INEC from conducting election in Adamawa State. Resident electoral commissioners spoke on preparations for bye-elections. Stories on the bye-elections that took place were carried on March 20.

On March 21, the station reported the Chairman of PDP, Chief Solomon Lar, calling on the party members to close ranks. The president-elect also hosted a dinner for visiting IMF boss. The result of the bye-election in Rivers State was announced.

On March 22, President-elect spoke on his plans to privatise parastatals and the station also reported that the Court of Appeal had struck out an election petition. *Platform* featured Prof. Soyinka who aired his political views.

On March 23, it was reported that the Appeal Court had rejected Falaes' application to interrogate INEC Chairman. Archbishop Okogie was also reported to have called on Falae to drop his appeal.

Between March 24 and 28, the bulletins focused on Chief Chuba Egolum's appeal to the Supreme Court over the striking out by the Court of Appeal of his petition challenging the results of the presidential elections. INEC chief in Osun State was also reported to have called for peace. Imams were also reported to have called for tolerance among politicians.

On March 29, the presiding Justice of the Court of Appeal was reported to have called for restraint on the part of the press. Imo State Military Administrator was reported to have inspected the House of Assembly project while his counterpart in Cross Rivers State advised elected members of the House of Assembly on their crucial role. The edition of *Platform* aired on that day featured mainly views of Nigerians on their expectations from the General Obasanjo government. The Rivers State governor-elect also spoke of his vision for the state.

On March 30, the bulletin reported that the Court of Appeal would not take statements from electoral officials.

(iii) Nigerian Television Authority, Abuja

The official declaration of the presidential election result by the Chairman of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Justice Ephraim Akpata on March 1 kicked off political news stories during the month under review. This was followed by news of the defeated APP presidential candidate, Chief Olu Falae's rejection of the result on the basis of alleged malpractices on the part of PDP.

On March 2, the station reported the party held in honour of International Observers by INEC. The station also reported the speech by the president-elect, General Obasanjo. The news bulletin of March 3, carried three political news items and one featured the news of the National Chairman of APP who spoke on the presidential election results..

Presentation of certificate to the Chairman of PDP was the highlight of the news broadcast on March 4, and this was followed by a report on the organisation of a victory party for General Obasanjo's wife, Stella, by some women groups.

Chief Falae's decision to contest the presidential result was broadcast on the news bulletin of March 9.

On March 18, the station aired the APP's National Secretary's explanation that the recourse to the law court over the presidential election result did not amount to unsettling the transition programme, but should be seen as part of the democratic struggle.

The station on March 25 gave an update of proceedings in the courts in the presidential elections suits, filed by Chief Falae and Chief Chuba Egolum.

Towards the end of March until the end of the month, the political stories were mostly related to events in the courtrooms. Specifically, on March 29, the station announced the the election petition tribunal had fixed April 5 as the judgment day.

(iv) **Ray Power Radio, Lagos**

Ray Power was able to draw relevant political events to its listeners' attention on March 1 with its comprehensive coverage of the formal announcement of the results of the presidential elections. The report was detailed and INEC Chairman, Justice Ephraim Akpata, was quoted as saying that General Olusegun Obasanjo (rtd.), presidential candidate of the PDP got 18,738,154 votes representing 62.78 per cent of the total votes cast nation-wide in respect of the presidential elections. Chief Olu Falae of APP was reported to have scored 11,110,287 votes representing 37.22 per cent of the votes cast.

With this result PDP got a quarter votes in 32 states and the FCT while APP got 23 states and the FCT.

Justice Akpata reportedly said that General Obasanjo emerged winner "having scored more than a quarter of votes cast in each of at least two-thirds of the 36 states of the federation and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) and having obtained more votes than Chief Olu Falae of the All Peoples Party (APP)."

The station went further to immediately report the reactions of party chieftains following the formal announcement of the results. In a live coverage, the protest letter released by the AD/APP alliance in reaction to INEC's announcement was read in full. The letter mentioned "a consistent pattern of inflated figures generally far in excess of those accredited at the polling stations".

The station reported that the statement was jointly signed by Chief Olu Falae, AD/APP presidential candidate, and his running mate in the elections, Alhaji Umaru Skinkafi. The statement said the alliance was protesting because it does not "intend to establish and support the confirmation of dictatorship in whatever form".

This was subsequently followed by an interview session with Ambassador Yusuff Mamman, the National Publicity Secretary of the Alliance for Democracy (AD). He claimed that there was "so much wide scale and colossal abuse – alteration of figures, ballot stuffing nation-wide" and that the result "has made a mockery of (the) genuine desire of (the) Nigerian people for change from militarised democracy to civil democracy".

For reportorial balance, Ray Power interviewed some PDP chieftains including Senator Iyorchia Ayu, the party's campaign coordinator who said that the victory of his party in the presidential election was consistent with the support accorded the party from the onset.

The station's political education programme, *Fact File*, of March 1 was titled: *The Way Forward – Is it normal for politicians to complain after elections?*

In its news X-ray of March 1, the station advocated the need for politicians to accept election results so that the nation can move forward on a democratic level.

The *Fact File* programme segment of March 2, focused on a very salient political issue. The edition was titled: *Can Electoral Complaints Prevent the Military from Leaving?* The X-ray focused on: The Tasks Before The President-elect.

While it congratulated the PDP for its victory, it urged it not to have a prolonged celebration but take time to assess the problems at hand and prepare to tackle them so that the electorate will not be disappointed. It expressed the view that General Obasanjo will live up to the expectations of all Nigerians.

The March 5 edition of *Fact File* featured reactions to the presidential election result and the release of General Oladipo Diya and his co-convicts over an alleged coup plot, in an edition titled: *The Way Forward*.

The editions of March 8 and 9 focused on non-transition political issues. But the edition of March 18 focused on a very controversial political issue. It was titled: *Operation Sweep after May 29*.

The civic education programme, *Your Rights and Obligations*, focused on The Role of Security Agencies (Police as a reference point) in the Post-Military Era (March 13).

On March 19, the news X-ray concentrated on the election petition suit instituted by Chief Falae who was contesting the results of the February 27 elections. The station reminded viewers that the Falae court case has put the judiciary on trial again. It assessed the role of the judiciary in 1993 over the June 12 issue and came up with a poser – Will the judiciary act on point of law or political interests this time around?

For an informed analysis, the station sought the views of two lawyers, Messrs. Mike Okoye and Festus Keyamo. Mr. Mike Okoye said the court should be careful in its deliberations so that the judiciary will not abort the transition process. He attested to the integrity of members of the Court of Appeal and expressed confidence that the outcome of the appeal will be “in line with justice”.

In his own opinion, Mr. Festus Keyamo said that if the irregularities are not so monumental, then the weight of public policy must take precedence. “No matter how hard you look at the matter, there is a pressing need for democracy to be established in this country”, he stressed.

On March 23, the station also gave extensive coverage to the proceedings at the election petition tribunal, particularly the permission granted Chief Falae’s lawyers to inspect documents relating to February 27 elections which were in INEC’s custody.

The station also reported on the proceedings at the election petition tribunal on March 25.

(v) Nigerian Television Authority, Kaduna

The announcement of the election result on March 1 started the political broadcast on the station during the month under review. There were also reactions of the losers and winners of the presidential election.

On March 3, NTA’s local news bulletin, tagged *Periscope*, relayed an appeal to the defeated APP presidential candidate, Chief Olu Falae, to accept the result. It also reported another appeal to PDP president-elect General Olusegun Obasanjo, to reduce *Hajj* fares when he resumes office.

On March 8, the station’s news broadcast had only one political story in the bulletin. On March 12, there was a news item on the vice-president-elect’s address calling for support and harmony among all sides and the people of Nigeria.

(vi) MiNAJ Systems Television

The declaration of General Olusegun Obasanjo of PDP as the president elect on March 1, by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Chairman, Justice Ephraim Akpata kicked-off political reports of the station during the month under review.

The station gave a detailed report on the results and even carried the expectations of the people from the newly elected President. Comments of some international and local observers were also broadcast. The station also reported comments of the defeated APP/AD presidential candidate, Chief Olu Falae.

On March 2, the political reports continued with the maiden speech of General Obasanjo which was quite detailed. There was also a report on the post-election mood of people in the Federal Capital Territory.

The station's bulletin of March 3 was loaded with political stories. There was a story on the views of the elite on democracy and its workability in Nigeria.

The presentation of a certificate of election to General Obasanjo as the president-elect by Justice Akpata formed the core of the political news of the station on March 4. The station also relayed three other political news items on its 7.30 World News broadcast of same day.

Between the March 5 and 12, political stories continued to be highlighted on the station's news broadcast. There was a steady flow of stories generated by the station in the area of post-election democratic development. They ranged from how the behaviour of security agents to the public will be affected by the change in administration to guidelines on the filing and hearing of petition relating to the presidential elections.

The station on March 9 reported Chief Falae's decision to contest the election result in the court.

On March 10, the station reported PDP's disagreement with the Federal Government's privatisation scheme. On March 15, the station carried an impressive number of political stories in its bulletin, the highlight being the petition filed by Chief Falae over the presidential results. Other news items included an update on General Obasanjo's world tour and another action filed against the result of the presidential election by a concerned party-man, Chief Chuba Egolum.

There was also a *pot pourri* interview on how the political climate in the country was affecting investment from international trade, a story generated by the station. Although the station refrained from airing its view, the people interviewed revealed that more foreign investors were seeking to invest in Nigeria due to the changing political climate.

On March 20, the president-elect's statement on scrapping the Petroleum Trust Fund was reported on the news broadcast. The views of some media experts were also sought on the president-elect's remarks concerning the PTF.

The station in its March 21, bulletin carried the report of a Court of Appeal sitting in Jos declaring as null and void, the election of Alhaji Ahmed Mu'azu as the governor of Bauchi State.

There was a story on the withdrawal of the President of the Court of Appeal from the Chief Falae's petition on March 21. It was prominently aired and very detailed. The station did not comment on the petition, but reported the facts.

Political news items on station's news broadcast closed with the fixture of the judgment day for Chief Falae's petition. The station gave reasons for the choice of the date which they ascribed to the limitation in the guidelines on election petitions.

7. ANALYSIS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

(a) ANALYSIS

(i) African Independent Television (AIT), Lagos

For the month of March, political stories and programmes reduced considerably obviously due to the conclusion of the elections and the emergence of a president-elect.

In fact, for the first week, most of the political programmes were not aired for some days. *Democracy Today* was not aired during its usual slot time. Instead, a programme on Nigeria '99 was broadcast. In place of *Issues in Democracy*, an energy programme was aired.

But the station gave much airtime to the announcement of the presidential election result and the disputations arising from the results, most of which were balanced in their presentations.

The station's political/civic education programmes such as *Issues in Democracy* and *Searchlight* aired several post-election democratic development issues and gave a comprehensive, balanced and easy-to-understand report of the proceedings in the electoral courts during the month under review.

Also given much airtime was the world tour of the president-elect, General Obasanjo.

(ii) Radio Nigeria, Abuja

On the network service of the FRCN there were four network news bulletins of 30 minutes each day at 7am, 4pm, 7pm and 10pm. There was a 15minutes political programme called *Platform* broadcast at 7.30pm on Mondays and Thursdays. There was a special *Radio Link* (audience participation phone-in programme) during the month under review. It was aired for two hours and focused on civic education.

A 30-minutes programme of news four times everyday for 31 days comes to 62 hours a month. There was one 2-hour programme, *Radio Link* that focused on the civic responsibilities of elected persons. The 15-minutes weekly political programme, *Platform*, broadcast eight editions during the month under review, which totaled two hours. These give a total of 66 hours of total broadcast for the month.

A 30-minutes news bulletin in the network service will contain about eight items of news (i.e. about four minutes per item)

The 62 hours of news broadcast during the month under review, therefore, would have contained an average of 930 items of news i.e. 62 (hours) x 60 (minutes) divided by four (minutes). Added to the two hours of *Radio Link* and *Platform* for a total of 2 hours too, this gives a total of 66 hours of political broadcast time.

During the month under review, there were 94 items of news pertaining to allegations of electoral fraud, loyal opposition, accountability in governance, post-election democratic development and others. This comes down to six hours 27 minutes (94 news items x four minutes) of the 62 hours of news broadcast or 10 % of the entire news broadcast during the month under review. Of these 94 items, 49 items were on allegations of electoral fraud. Post-election democratic activities items were 45 items. So, of the six hours of political stories for the month of March (49x4mins) three hours 16 minutes were related to government statements and actions related to the electoral fraud allegations and court actions. Post-election democratic development took about three

hours too. This is an improvement over previous month's focus, perhaps because elections have been concluded.

In addition to the news bulletin focus on the variables, the special programmes such as *Platform* and *Radio Link* also devoted much of their airtime to these variables. For example, the two hour *Radio Link* airtime was devoted to discussion of issues in post-election democratic development. Two hours 30 minutes of *Platform* airtime also went to post-election democratic development with 15 minutes going to allegations of electoral fraud.

With respect to other political issues during the month under review, which did not fall within the purview of the four main variables, the PDP was mentioned 14 times, only once negatively. There were only two instances when it was not mentioned when it should have been mentioned. The APP was mentioned five times, once negatively. But there were six instances when it should have been mentioned, but was not. The AD was mentioned two times in the bulletins both positively. But it was not mentioned six times, when it should have been. There were five other non-party stories but equally politically important that were not mentioned.

There were instances when the station failed to air some political news stories which, in their magnitude and import deserved mention. Some of these include the station's silence on the condemnation of the transition programme by a pro-democracy group, Democratic Alternative, on March 2. There was also its silence on Archbishop Okogie's call on Chief Falae to accept defeat on March 3, and the expulsion of some APP bigwigs.

Another case in point was the non-representation of APP/AD on the station's *Radio Link* of March 6, although the programme reviewed the task before newly elected officials at all levels of government.

The station also ignored a meeting of APP/AD chieftains on their planned merger, AD's threat to release the 'authentic' result of the presidential election and the meeting between APP national chairman and the president-elect in Ota, Ogun state.

Thus, while Radio Nigeria must be commended for retaining its political programme, *Platform* and relaying it religiously, too, it must, however, be pointed out that its coverage of the political transition, news-wise, was quite unimpressive, as its news bulletins had a very scanty political content.

(iii) Nigerian Television Authority, Abuja

The Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) in Abuja during the month under review, kept tenaciously to its policy of non-transmission of its own political programmes, depending solely on the NTA network service. This, of course, has not been beneficial to its audience. The daily network news at 9 p.m feeds NTA Abuja audience with political news stories, but no local political news stories were added to the news broadcast. With the conclusion of the presidential elections, the network service shifted focus on its programme *Face the Nation* from solely political discourse to other events such as the World Youth Championship football competition slated for April.

However, while the station presented most of its political stories professionally, a few other instances leave much to be desired. For example, on March 1, the announcement of the winner of the presidential election by INEC's chairman and the reactions thereof relayed on the same day were given fairly equal airtime and the reports were also fair. There was no detection of implied bias on the part of the correspondents.

But on March 2, there was no report about the attitude of the public to the results; their acceptance or otherwise of the results even though there were pockets of violence in some parts of the South West of the country.

When on March 9 it announced the decision of Chief Falae, presidential candidate of AD/APP alliance, to go to court, there was no reaction from the PDP. And there was no comment or analysis on the part of the correspondents on Chief Falae's move.

By mid-March, political reports on the station had decreased and when such reports were included in the bulletin, they were mainly on the disputed presidential election result.

(iv) Ray Power Radio, Lagos

The formal declaration of General Olusegun Obasanjo (rtd.) as the President-elect by INEC Chairman Justice Ephraim Akpata (rtd.) on March 1 somewhat heightened the tempo of political reporting in the sense that the three political parties – PDP, APP and AD were no longer competing for prominence.

Understandably, the focus of attention shifted to events in the victorious PDP camp, the activities of the President-elect and the proceedings at the Court of Appeal, Abuja following the suit instituted by the defeated APP Presidential candidate, Chief Olu Falae on the outcome of the February 27 presidential elections

However, while Ray Power deserves commendation for its balanced coverage, the station ought to be cautioned over the manner its reporters act on air. For example, while reading the AD/APP protest letter, one could discern an air of disdain, particularly when one of the reporters made a remark that the protest letter will not achieve the desired result (nullification of the elections) since INEC Chairman had already made a formal announcement.

Also, on Thursday March 25 the news presenter, made uncomplimentary remarks about the slow pace of the case which he attributed to the time wasting tactics of lawyers to the petitioner, Chief Olu Falae. The presenter accused the petitioner of “taking his time to examine all the documents relating to the presidential elections in 25 states”. He said this process might take some time thereby “impacting on the legal process and by extension, the transition programme”. This amounts to calling to question the sincerity and intentions of the petitioner.

Thirdly, one of the station's reporters while interviewing Yusuff Mamman (National Publicity Secretary, AD) kept on saying that the reaction of the AD/APP Alliance was a case of ‘sour grapes’ because Chief Falae lost.

On the other hand, the station scored a plus with the way it presented its *Fact File* programme during the month under review. The editions relating to the political transition were objectively presented and audience responses were good.

The same can be said of its News X-ray during the month.

However, another of the station's civic/political education programme, *Your Rights and Duties*, which used to be very active and informative on voter education, was not active during the month under review. It was on air only once during the month (March 13). Its civic education programme, *Political Update*, was simply rested.

In terms of general news coverage, Ray Power devoted a high degree of attention to other areas rather than politics. But on a few instances, political news coverage topped the news focus. For example on March 1, the bulletin of *News Express* had 10 new items with seven devoted to politics. This is understandable considering the fact that the results of the presidential election was formally announced that day.

All these activities, however, have not changed the station's reluctance to broadcast news on Weekends. The weekends of March 6 and 7; 13 and 14; 20 and 21 as well as March 27 and 28 did not have news broadcasts in line with the station's house style.

(v) Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Kaduna

Political Broadcast on NTA Kaduna for the month of March seemed to have died with the presidential elections of February 27.

Most of the news broadcast monitored did not include the bulk of political events that made news in the month of March. While stories on the anniversary celebration of an Akwa Ibom Chief was reported on March 29, the appointment of judges for the hearing of Chief Falae's case against General Obasanjo's election was not mentioned at all. Could this be an error in news judgment or an oversight?

The closing address on the dispute over the presidential election result was not reported on NTA Kaduna's news bulletin. Countdown to Nigeria '99, however, dominated the news broadcast both of March 30 and 31.

Although *Periscope* is translated in Hausa, it was observed that the translation is usually inadequate and in many cases, relays the news stories missed out in the English version. For example on March 29, while the appointment of judges for the presidential case was omitted in the English version of the news, it was mentioned in the Hausa version and in detail too.

However, in the Hausa version of March 12, the news on the vice-president-elect's address was not translated accurately in that it suggested that opposition to the results by other parties should be treated as an act of set back. But in the English version, the news the impression gave was a call for support and harmony among all sides and the people of Nigeria.

Even the petition against the election of General Obasanjo as president in the Court of Appeal was not featured on March 13.

The station's civic education programme *Enduring Polity* which went a long way in passing civic knowledge into the people of Kaduna State, was not aired at all. It seemed to fade out with the conclusion of the elections. Also *Face the State* another programme that featured mainly politics up until last month, was also not on air.

The people of the state did not have adequate follow-up on the political scene after the elections. The dispute over the presidential election was treated with such levity that the people might not have understood the implication and depth of the case; reports on it were few and far between.

There seemed to be no analysis on cases of election malpractices, whether genuine or not. Obviously, reports/broadcast on the station in the month of March must have left its viewers unsatisfied.

The president elect's tour which made news in other media, was not well featured on this station, perhaps, depending on the network service to feed its audience.

On post-election democratic development, NTA Kaduna obviously did not regard it as an important enough issue for its viewers. The station focussed on other local events, ignoring political broadcast.

(vi) MiNAJ Systems Television, Obosi

The station started well with a detailed report of the announcement of the result of the February 27, presidential election, and issues around it. It also handled the maiden speech of the president-elect professionally and objectively.

Its news analysis went a long way to further enlighten the general public on democracy, such as the news analysis of March 12 which focused on how the behaviour of security agents to the public will be affected by the change in administration, to guidelines on the filing and hearing of petitions relating to the presidential election. Although the station refrained from airing its views, the people interviewed revealed that more foreign investors were seeking to invest in Nigeria due to the changing political climate. This was quite informative to the viewers of the station.

But the political news items on the station's news bulletins dropped significantly as from March 16 as there was a lull in the station's initial zeal for generating political stories and ideas.

Also, the station, unlike its previous usual style, could not sustain the use of actuality.

While the station must be commended for its detailed focus on the legal action by Chief Falae and post-election democratic development issues, it disappointed most of its viewers on its political broadcast during the month under review by resting its political education programme, *Political Dairy*, from which viewers used to benefit.

(b) CONCLUSION

During the month under review, there was a remarkable drop in the airtime and attention given to political stories and events by all the broadcast stations monitored. All the stations discontinued with one programme or the other in which they had hitherto educated their viewers / listeners about the goings-on in the political arena.

As was expected, broadcast media focus shifted during the month under review to mainly issues of allegations of electoral fraud and post-election democratic development. While there were a few other areas of focus, which could largely be categorised under "others" in our list of variables, there were very scanty mentions of issues relating accountability in governance and loyal opposition.

Some of the stations monitored performed quite remarkably with respect to being objective in their presentations of political news in spite of the significant decline in their airtime allocation to political news events.

Among such stations are African Independent Television (AIT), Ray Power Radio and MiNAJ Systems Television.

But this could not be said of the other three stations monitored. They are Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) in Abuja and Kaduna, and Radio Nigeria in Abuja.

While the first few days of AIT political broadcast during the month under review were mainly related to the formal announcement of the presidential election result by INEC chairman and issues around it, the focus of attention was to later shift to the court rooms when the presidential aspirant of AD/APP alliance Chief Falae and another interested politician, Chief Egolum, went to court to contest the election result.

Other areas of focus were the world tour embarked upon by the president elect and issues in post-election democratic development.

It is regrettable, however, that the station had to rest some of its political / civic education programmes during the month under review.

The same pattern of shift in focus was noticed with AIT sister station, Ray Power Radio. Ray Power also displayed the same level of objectivity in its news and

programmes presentation. However, the only area of sore note was the penchant by some of its presenters and reporters to become emotional on air.

MiNAJ Systems Television unlike the previous but one month when it was visibly pro-PDP, was very objective in its news reports during the month under review. Its only sore point was having to rest its political/civic education programme, *Political Dairy* which left its viewers with no other avenue to benefit from its political transmission.

As for Radio Nigeria, Abuja, while the station deserves to be commended for retaining its political/civic education programme *Platform*, and for promptly shifting focus to issues relating to allegations of electoral fraud and post-election democratic development, it must be noted that several news of immense significance were left out of its news broadcast during the month under review.

In addition, most of its post-election democratic development programmes left out very important segments of the political group which made the programmes lopsided.

For NTA Abuja, though, the elections have come and gone yet no effort has been made to prepare the viewers in the nation's capital city on the political developments and how they fit into the in-coming dispensation. The station continues to rate poorly on its fulfillment of its obligation towards its audience in the area of political reporting and broadcast. Political programmes to sensitize the viewers on their roles in the new dispensation can still be introduced on the station.

In the case of NTA Kaduna, there were no instances of implied bias in its news reports, but the station's political/civic education programmes, *Face-the-State* and *Enduring Polity*, were off the air during the month under review. Thus, not much of post-election democratic development programmes were aired.

Worst of all, the station's news translation in Hausa was in some instances quite unrepresentative of the English version and thus misleading.

(c) RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the above analysis and conclusion, Media Rights Agenda reiterates its previous recommendations that:

- * 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 reconsider the provisions of Decree No. 35 of 1998 which limits to one hour at the most the airtime a station may devote to a political party in a week

- * In view of the greater advantage of the broadcast media over its print counterpart, government can enhance greater participation, as well as stimulate more citizen's interest in the political transition programme by initiating policies that will make radio and television sets more affordable for the masses.

- * It is also recommended that broadcast stations should introduce vernacular political programmes to cater for the barely literate and less privileged Nigerians. They too deserve to know more about political developments and participate in the running of government.

- * It is recommended that elections slated to take place under this transition programme having been completed, special political programmes introduced as a result of the transition elections should now focus on discussing other issues such as accountability in governance, loyal opposition and post election democratic development.

In this way, many of these programmes will remain relevant and should, therefore, not be discontinued.

Error Margin

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



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- 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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