

# Airwaves Scorecard

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



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

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**March 1999**



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ISSN 1119-7110**

## PREFACE

This report is the third 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.

Readers will notice that we have in this report, omitted a substantial part of our first report, especially in the areas of introduction, general consideration and assessing the government. This is because the status quo has remained.

However, we have retained substantially the areas regarding the legal boundaries of election report in Nigeria and objectives of the exercise.

We have here also, deleted the background report on the broadcast stations monitored published in our February edition.

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

All in all, readers, we believe, will find the content of this publication quite interesting and educative.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This report was written by **Josephine Izuagie**, Co-ordinator of the Broadcast Monitoring Project, and **Osaro Odemwingie**, Publications Officer for MRA. **Bunmi Oke** provided secretarial services for the project.

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

Media Rights Agenda is grateful to the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) in Washington D.C. for providing the financial support for the research and publication of the report.

Media Rights Agenda is also grateful for the technical assistance it received from ARTICLE 19, the International Centre Against Censorship, in London, which supplied copies of its recent publication: "Election Reporting - A Practical Guide to Media Monitoring" to the project personnel, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) in Washington, D.C., which also provided copies of the "NDI Handbook - How Domestic Organisations Monitor Elections: An A to Z Guide", and the Carter Centre of Emory University in Atlanta for providing MRA with its book "Television and Election".

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

This is the third report of the Broadcast Monitoring Project of Media Rights Agenda (MRA). It is based on the monitoring of selected broadcast media to assess the coverage of political issues during the period between February 1 and February 28, 1999.

This report focuses on the coverage of the political programme by four Television and two Radio stations.

The Television stations are:

1. The Federal Government-owned Nigeria Television Authority (NTA), in Abuja.
2. The Federal Government-owned Nigeria Television Authority (NTA), in Kaduna.
3. Private-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. Private-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 published in January 1999. But suffice it to say that in that report, we established that the basis of media monitoring and report on electoral exercise is founded on a variety of regional and international human rights instruments as well as a moral obligation. Both ensure that citizens make informed choices whenever they enter a polling booth.

We established also that in certain instances limitations on these rights of the media to monitor and report on the transition have been approved in some cases to maintain public order, protect privacy or ban 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 full discuss can also be found in the pilot report. But suffice it to say also that 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 points of views are being fairly and equitably communicated so that the people may make informed choices.

Specifically, it was noted that, indeed, the prime place of Television and Radio as medium of political mobilisation is incontestable. The television with its visual effect can create the most potent awareness and emotion. The radio is especially important in a country such as ours where illiteracy is high, where newspapers do not circulate beyond major towns and where television is not widely available because of poor electricity supplies 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.

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1. See *Who Rules the Airwaves: Broadcasting in Africa (Article 19 and Index on Censorship, London 1995) p. 1*

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.”<sup>2</sup>

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.

The National Broadcasting Code outlines “the minimum standard to be observed by all operators of radio and television stations” in Nigeria<sup>3</sup>. As part of these standards, it provides extensive guidelines for political coverage.<sup>4</sup> 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.

2. See p.9 Paragraph 1.4.5 of *The National Broadcasting Code, 2nd Edition (National Broadcasting Commission, 1996)*.

3. *Ibid* p. 3, paragraph 1. 1. 2

4. *Ibid* p. 31, paragraph 4. 4

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 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.”

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5. *Ibid* p. 53, paragraph 7.8

#### **(d) OBJECTIVES OF EXERCISE**

The objectives remain as stated in the previous reports. Those include to monitor the coverage by the broadcast 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. What guidelines for direct-access programming have been laid down by the Electoral Commission?
- b. What type of direct-access programming is being aired?
- c. Are the programmes live or taped?
- d. Do the programmes include “ actuality” - recordings of the candidates in their own words and voices?
- e. Do the programmes allow candidates and parties to explain their platforms and views?
- f. Do the programmes give the voters the opportunity to form opinion about the character of each candidate, their platform and parties?
- g. Do all the parties and candidates have equal time and similar programme formats?
- h. Are the parties’ programmes aired at similar times during the day?
- i. Are the broadcasting slot given free of charge?
- j. If airtime is paid for, can it be said that no discounts were given to specific parties?
- k. Are there 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 transition 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, there are also 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 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 press 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".

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

### **(b) The Broadcast Media**

Considering the role of the broadcast media in helping to ensure the enthronement and sustenance of democracy, the questions to be addressed shall be as spelt-out in the objectives. In sum total it shall address the following:

(a) How the broadcast 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 broadcast media acts to ensure fair and objective coverage of political parties and candidates in news and information reporting.

(c) How the broadcast media acts 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**

It is noted that the General and Legal Environment that prevailed during the month under review, were same as the months before i.e. December 1998 and January 1999. A reproduction of the assessment is, therefore, considered not necessary.

But it is note worthy to point out that during the month under review INEC, the electoral body, canceled a live television debate scheduled between the presidential candidates of PDP and AD/APP Alliance. This is contrary to provisions of Decree No. 35 of 1998, which in Paragraph 4.5 invest on the broadcast media the duty to report on the political transition programme and especially encourage healthy debate among and between candidate standing election.

To the extent that the ban on live debate was not premised on the maintenance of public order, protection of privacy or capable of eliciting religious, racial and national hatred, it is considered an attack on the press and attempt to restrict the press access to political news sources.

Also, it must be mentioned here that the Decree is considered highly restrictive. It stipulates that political parties broadcast should not exceed 1 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.

In a situation where there is palpable disenchantment with the political situation, one would have expected that broadcast media in particular and the mass media in general ought to have been encouraged to focus heavily on the political transition programme to get apathetic Nigerians to embrace it.

### **4 ASSESSING THE BROADCAST 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.**

Naturally, since the focus is on daily broadcast monitoring and is on going, there are obviously new developments to report. However, the limitations and variables established for the previous reports still remains the same. They are hereby reproduced to underscore their importance.

## **(a) Limitations**

The period to be covered shall be six months, between 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 February 1999.

In the same vein, the monitoring focuses on the registered political parties. These are Alliance for Democracy (AD), All People's Party (APP), and People's Democratic Party (PDP).

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

## **(b) Variables**

### **(i) Stories on Government Activities**

We shall consider the stories generated from government activities, conducts and pronouncements bordering on the transition programme and how they are broadcast.

### **(ii) Stories on INEC**

This include stories generated from the activities of the commission through press conferences, interviews by its officials and any civic education programme sponsored by the commission.

### **(iii) Stories on APP, PDP and AD.**

This includes stories generated from the three political parties, individually and jointly, through press conferences, campaigns, rallies, meetings and others. The length of time given each party or candidate is likewise considered.

### **(iv) Informed Commentaries**

This includes programmes where political analysts are interviewed on their views about particular political issues or conduct of elections or the transition programme in general. This may also include opinion polls.

### **(v) Voter Education**

This is aimed at programmes that educate the voters. It shall consider the use of the broadcast media to reach groups that may have traditionally lower voting patterns in order to encourage them to vote. Such programmes might be sponsored by the media organisation themselves or by INEC.

### **(vi) Advertisement / Direct Access**

This shall include programmes sponsored by political parties or their candidates to inform the public of their programmes or intention to contest. It will also look at advertisement taken out in between some other non-political programmes.

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

Understandably, the coverage given by a particular radio / television station to the political transition programme as a whole and the various variables listed above, will most likely 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, was published in our February report.<sup>6</sup>

A reproduction of this is not considered necessary.

## **6. PRESENTATION OF RESULT OF THE BROADCAST MEDIA MONITORING FOR THE MONTH OF FEBRUARY 1999.**

The month of February is considered as an important and special month in Nigeria as Nigerians twice trooped out in millions to vote for democratically elected representatives.

Mass media organisations all did their best to make the last stage of General Abubakar's transition programme a success. A blow-by-blow account of the performances of each of the monitored broadcast media is, hereunder, presented.

### **(i) Radio Nigeria, ABUJA**

During the month of February, coverage of the transition programme by the Radio Nigeria, Abuja, opened with the story of the training of election monitors for the National Assembly and Presidential elections. It was also reported that over 2000 journalists have been accredited to monitor the Presidential and National Assembly elections. There was also a report that government would adopt the 1979 Constitution for the present transition. The CGS, Okhai Akhigbe, said this after a PRC meeting. Government also set up a committee to plan hand-over of power to the civilian government.

Screening of candidates for the national Assembly stories dominated the bulletins over the next couple of days up to February 5.

On the 5th, a political programme 'Platform' featured presidential aspirants of both the PDP and APP jostling for support. Specifically it featured former Senate president Dr Joseph Wayas of APP and Dr Iyorchia Ayu representing General Obasanjo. The news bulletin

6. *See Airwaves Scorecard - Report of the Broadcast Media Coverage of The Political Transition Programme - February 1999.*

that night at 7pm said that INEC has declared the APP/AD alliance as not feasible. Reacting to the misunderstanding in the APP, INEC said it recognises the APP leadership under Alhaji Mahmud Waziri. But the bulletin ignored the adoption by the Eastern Zone AD of Dr Ezeife as its presidential candidate.

On the 7th, the Military Administrator of Cross Rivers State, Capt. Osondu, called on politicians to show maturity while his counterpart in Ondo set up a committee on handing over to a civilian government. However, ignored in the bulletin was the primary between Chief Olu Falae and Dr Ezeife of the AD. News of the endorsement of Alabo Graham Douglas as PDP presidential aspirant for the South/South was carried on the 8th as well as the meeting between the Chief of General Staff and politicians in which he called on them to maintain the peace and decorum. On that same day of 8th, a decree giving legal backing to the constitution was promulgated and the committee on the hand-over to civilians was inaugurated. But the APP presidential aspirants' meeting in Abuja to streamline their plans was not carried with the bulletin.

INEC Chairman on 9th told party leaders that the commission will not succumb to their threats and intimidation and a warning by the Administrator of Delta State that politicians in the state would be held responsible for any acts of violence by their supporters. There was also a civic education news analysis on the need for politics of issues not personalities.

On the 10th Justice Akpata said, at the launching of a training manual for election officials, that INEC was not opposed to the proposed alliance between the APP and AD. No mention was made of the PDP's Presidential aspirant, Dr Alex Ekwueme's press conference in Abuja. There was a news item on the 11th that only seven of the eleven PDP Presidential aspirants were cleared to vie for the party's nomination at the Jos convention. That same day, there was a workshop for women politicians in Abuja not reflected in the bulletin.

The parties' convention held sway in the bulletins for the next couple of days as well as arrivals of international observers for the elections. There was also a report in the bulletin of an attempt to bribe the APP chairman with N30 million.

On the 15th, the news was the nomination of Dr Ogbonnaya Onu and General Obasanjo as the presidential candidates of the APP and PDP, respectively. Also aired is the protests at the APP convention in Kaduna. The news analysis was a civic education on the need for a new political orientation.

The station reported on the 16th, that the APP and AD have adopted a joint Presidential candidate, Chief Falae. It also announced that there would be a presidential debate for the

candidates. Later on that day we heard that the running mate of Chief Falae is Alhaji Umaru Shinkafi of APP and Dr Onu's protest as the authentic candidate of the APP was mentioned. It was carried that INEC has recruited and trained election monitors and briefed foreign journalists. There was the story that the police had made adequate security arrangements for the elections.

On the 17th at 7.30pm the political programme 'Platform' featured INEC's denial that ballot papers for the presidential elections were printed by Triple Heritage owned by former Head of State General Babangida. INEC also said that it has taken cognizance of the APP/AD alliance. On the same day there were stories that INEC has cleared the Presidential candidates of APP and PDP. Also, we heard that the decree backing the remaining elections have been approved by the PRC and that there would be a by-election in Adamawa State for the Gubernatorial seat vacated by Alhaji Abubakar Atiku, running mate to General Obasanjo. It was carried that the national debate for the presidential candidates has been postponed.

On the 18th the Head of State renewed his appeal to Nigerians to join hands to ensure the success of the remaining elections. It was reported also that arrangements for the National Assembly elections were being finalised and the electorate were informed of the importance of the election and the need to vote wisely.

On the 19th a repeat of the previous day's political stories in addition to the promulgation of two decrees guiding the Presidential and National Assembly elections were aired. The PDP mobilisation jingle was played thrice on the day and as well as a civic education talk on laying a solid foundation for the next republic.

There was a rehash of notable personalities contesting the National Assembly seats across the country including Generals Joe Garba and Ike Nwachukwu. PDP Vice-Presidential nominee, Alhaji Atiku, called on the party supporters to continue to vote PDP.

The campaign tours of Chief Falae and General Obasanjo were highlighted on the 20th as well as a reminder that it was voting day. Later on that day, we heard that the collation of votes had started. It told of low voter turnout. The Head of State also commended the conduct of the National Assembly polls. There was also the story that voting didn't take place in some areas in Delta State. Chief Falae was highlighted as saying that he will build a united Nigeria based on equity and justice.

On 21st some reports of the results of the National Assembly elections were announced. The Head of State General Abdulsalami Abubakar said anybody was free to contest elections except serving military officers and government functionaries. In that report also, there was a story of a Chairman-elect of a local government who was arrested in Akwa Ibom State for electoral malpractice.

It was reported that parties maintained their stronghold as the results coming had revealed. It was also reported that the PDP will launch its presidential campaign in Maiduguri and that five presiding officers have been arrested in Osun State. There was also a mobilisation jingle for women's participation in the transition

On 22nd it was reported that National Assembly election results from 30 states and Abuja have been received and also that the EU observer mission has expressed satisfaction with the conduct of the election. Also reported was that respondents generally adjudged the election as peaceful and fair. They blamed low voter turnout on a multiple of factors such as voter fatigue.

The PDP rally in Minna was adequately covered in the 'Platform' aired on that day. On the 23rd, it was highlighted that the running mate of Chief Falae, Alhaji Shinkafi, has been cleared by INEC. INEC boss in Borno State also said that difficult terrain was responsible for the delay in releasing the National Assembly poll results there.

It was also reported that the Presidential candidate of the PDP, General Obasanjo said he would ensure accountability in governance. But the APP Presidential flag bearer's campaign rally in Kano was not reflected. However, this was corrected during the 10.00pm bulletin on the same day, which also carried INEC's date for by-election in Delta State.

The 24th saw a repeat of stories of the previous day. New items were added including that of the PDP Presidential rally in Maiduguri. The Head of State renewed his appeal to all registered voters to exercise their franchise during the presidential election. African leaders commended INEC for the successful conduct of the National Assembly elections. The Director General National Orientation Agency advised politicians against taking unilateral action.

The Vice-Presidential debate by the APP and PDP candidates Alhaji Shinkafi and Alhaji Atiku, respectively, was broadcast between 8 – 9 p.m.

On 25th in the bulletin, the Head of State reiterated the preparedness of his administration to hand over power on May 29. Also INEC Chairman Justice Akpata reminded voters that there were only two parties, APP and PDP, fielding presidential candidates. Ignored in the bulletin was the APP Presidential rally in Kaduna that same day.

The news bulletin for the remaining day was replete with final preparation for the Presidential elections. There was a news analysis on the value of free and fair elections.

The PDP Presidential candidate General Obasanjo had a one-hour interview with reporters from NTA and FRCN. It was broadcast live between 8 – 9 p.m.

On 26th, the bulletin carried INEC Chairman's appeal to the electorate on the importance of the presidential election and the preparedness of his commission to conduct

the election. It was also reported that INEC has erected a giant notice board that would display the results of the election as they come in from the states. Nigerians also expressed their appreciation to the international community for its support of the transition programme. Expectedly, on the 27th, it was reported in the bulletin that Nigerians were going to the polls to elect a President. Also, it was carried that the Sultan of Sokoto had appealed to Nigerians to come out and vote. It was reported in the news that final preparations to receive the election results from the states have been completed and we heard a news analysis on the move towards democracy.

By 4.00p.m, it was reported that voting had ended and that the Head of State appealed to the presidential candidates to be prepared to accept the verdict of the electorate. It was also reported that the election recorded a mixed turn out nationwide.

On the 28th, the station reported that the election results have started coming in and that the Head of State has expressed satisfaction with the conduct of the Presidential election. Results from the FCT, Edo, Akwa-Ibom States were announced.

Between 12-2.00pm and 5-6.30pm, 'Election Special' a programme totally dedicated to announcing election results with situation report was aired. It gave out the results from the states as announced by INEC's Chairman.

Later that same day, the bulletin said that results from 30 States and Abuja have been received and the PDP had secured majority votes in 21 States and APP 9 States. There was also a report that all military officers holding political appointments would return to the barracks by May 29.

#### **(ii) Ray Power 100.5 FM Radio**

During the month under review, AIT devoted much of its airtime to political news reporting.

On February 4, the station reported INEC's statement that the AD/APP Alliance runs contrary to electoral laws. The meeting between the Federal Government and leaders of the three political parties - Alliance for Democracy (AD), All Peoples Party (APP), and Peoples Democratic Part (PDP), as well as the inauguration of the Transition Hand-over Committee on February 8, got media prominence.

INEC's meeting with party leaders over crucial political issues, particularly the alliance between the AD and the APP, in which INEC Chairman was reported to have quoted Electoral laws which are against the alliance on February 10.

On February 11, Ray Power reported the story about the Inspector - General of Police, Alhaji Ibrahim Coomassie, charging Police bosses to be alert to their duties during elections.

February 17 also recorded the story about the decision of the Federal Government to promulgate two election decrees in preparation for the National Assembly and Presidential Elections etc. It also reported that INEC had concluded the screening of General Obasanjo of PDP and Chief Falae of APP.

On February 18, on its 6.00pm news, was a story on PDP Presidential candidate, General Obasanjo. In the same bulletin, Dr. Ekwueme's story on the unlikelihood of protest votes in the South East, following his defeat at the PDP presidential primaries. To cap it, was Chief Falae's, Presidential candidate of AD/APP, decision to pull out ECOMOG from Sierra Leone, if elected into power.

On February 24, the station reported that Dr. Saraki and his group in the APP had authorised his supporters to vote for General Obasanjo of the PDP in the Presidential Elections of February 27. The story was given prominence during the 4.00pm and 6.00pm bulletins. Ray Power also aired a BBC report on the same day, in which Dr. Saraki expressed his displeasure about the AD/APP Alliance as well as his instruction that his followers should vote for PDP. BBC followed this up in 'Focus on Africa' with the report of the tumultuous welcome of General Obasanjo to Ilorin, the Kwara State Capital.

No attempt was made to get the APP side to the story.

There were no scheduled news bulletins on the following weekend dates: February 6, 7, 13, 14, 20, 21, 27 and 28.

The PDP convention was relayed live on Ray Power for 48 hours between February 13, 14, and to the early hours of 15. The report covered the accreditation of delegates at the Jos town ship stadium, the intrigues and horse-trading as well the balloting which began late February 14, at about 11.00pm and ended around 5.00am on February 15.

Earlier, the reporters had provided the background information on the presidential aspirants. These include General Obasanjo, Alabo Graham-Douglas, Dr. Ekwueme, Chief Nwobodo, Chief Don Etiebet, Chief Philip Asiodu and Senator Francis Ellah.

Each of the Presidential aspirants was given five minutes to address the delegates before voting began in earnest. General Obasanjo was subsequently elected as the party candidate by polling 1,648 ballots (67.97%) of total votes cast while Dr. Ekwueme came second with 591 votes.

Paradoxically, APP Convention in Kaduna during the same period the PDP Convention took place, did not receive much coverage from Ray Power. It featured as a brief commentary on February 15, when the party leaders ratified Dr. Onu as the APP flag bearer. Likewise, February 20, was devoted to the coverage of the National Assembly election, while February 21, was used to relay the results of the election in a piece-meal fashion.

Presidential aspirants including Dr. Saraki, (APP) Chief Falae (APP) and General Obasanjo (PDP), Dr. Ekwueme (PDP) ran several advertisements. The adverts were in English, pidgin and vernacular. There were also voter education jingles to persuade reluctant voters to go out and vote.

February 27, was the Presidential Election day and Ray Power busied itself gathering and collating election monitors' comments through its 'Polls Watch' segment. February 28, was used to announce the results in piece-meal as soon as they were released by INEC. 'Factfile', a public enlightenment programme that features from Monday to Friday between 8.15am to 9.00am focused mainly on political issues during the month under review. Relevant topics and posers were directed at listeners and the degree of audience participation (phone-in responses) showed the high regard for the programme.

Posers such as "Are politicians ready to take over from the Military?" (Feb 11); "The kind of people we want in the National Assembly" (Feb 19); and "Advice for INEC, Political Parties and Voters before the Presidential Elections" (Feb 26), were discussed.

Meanwhile, an innovation in its news report was added during the month under review with the introduction of X-ray segment. An x-ray on the need for a Presidential debate was aired on February 24. It said the debate would afford Nigerians a chance to know the candidates and also provide an opportunity for the politicians to garner more votes. Another x-ray on the significance of the Presidential Elections aired on February 26 called for the smooth conduct of politicians and Electoral officials.

### **(iii) African Independent Television**

During the month under review, AIT reported quite considerably on the political transition process. Most of the programmes and news package took a different outlook as the focus was on the presidential election. Nothing much was broadcast on the National Assembly election.

For the first time since the introduction of 'Polls Watch', it was aired twice this month for each election. Normally, the programme is aired on election days to report and analyse the election based on the reports from correspondents and callers that phoned-in. This time it was also aired on Sundays, the days following election days.

On February 3, AIT carried the advert of Dr. Ekwueme twice after the 9.00pm news. That same day, it also ran another advert for General Obasanjo. Chief Asiodu's advert was aired also.

Between February 4 and 7, it was advert galore by PDP candidates Chief General Obasanjo, Dr. Ekwueme and Chief Nwobodo.

On February 11, Chief Olusola Saraki of APP presidential advert was aired.

The PDP Abuja Secretariat district advert was aired on the 18th of February. On the 19th, Obasanjo advert campaign was carried.

For the first time this month, AD/APP Alliance ran an advert on the 21st and 22nd after the alliance had been firmly sealed.

From February 23, through to 26, when it had become clear who the presidential candidates of the parties were, General Obasanjo and Chief Falae's advert became a regular feature on television.

AIT aired live the PDP Jos Convention, which ran for almost two days. The result was read at about 10.00am on February 15, by Alhaji S. B. Makama, the Chief Returning Officer.

In fact, the live Vice-Presidential debate was held inside the AIT studio in Alagbado on February 24. The Presidential debate scheduled to hold on the 26th was cancelled on INEC's instructions. The result of the Presidential election of February 27 was prominently reported by AIT as soon as they were released.

Worthy of note also is the four-hour campaign programme organised for the parties to sell their programmes and manifestoes. The programme was aired on February 25, from 7.00pm to 11.00pm.

'Soni Irabor Live', during the month under review, had Chief Falae as a guest. General Obasanjo was featured the previous month. Several pro-democracy activists and parties chieftains were guests on the programme all talking politics. The same goes for 'Kakaki', a light-hearted phone-in A.M. programme.

Rear Admiral Aduwo (RTD) and Alhaji Shehu Musa, INEC's Commissioner for Oyo, Ogun and Lagos, were both on 'Issues in Democracy' and they spoke on the elections so far and the Presidential election in particular.

#### **(iv) MiNAJ System Television, Obosi, Anambra State**

The political broadcast in MiNAJ System Television for the month of February was not quite different from the previous month, January. Political reports started off on a low key, with the first week in the month recording at most two political news stories daily in the news broadcast.

Reports on political news items, however, picked up from the second week of the month, with more political stories in the news broadcasts and in the headlines. Preparation for the National Assembly election especially in Anambra State was given lots of publicity. The PDP primaries for the National Assembly election were also given prominence.

Advertisements on political parties and candidates were not frequent and those aired were mainly on PDP's candidates. Chief Ajegbo's advertisement took up the prime time, usually half way through the main news broadcast at 7.45p.m. PDP's presidential candidate,

Dr. Alex Ekwueme's advertisements were also carried on these slots, but not as frequently as those of Chief Ajegbo. The station did not carry any other party or candidate's advertisements, aside from those of the PDP.

In its bulletin of February 8, it reported the eventual emergence of Chief Olu Falae of AD, as the party's candidate. As from the 10th, there was an increase on reports of political stories. The number increased from two political stories in a bulletin to about five. It further increased to about eight to 10 news stories especially close to the election periods.

With the clearing, by PDP, of seven out of its eleven presidential aspirants, on the 11th, the station boosted its report on politics. This was also helped by other issues including arrival of the Commonwealth observers, the Inspector General of Police's security arrangements for the National Assembly election and the National Orientation Agency's call on electorate to actively participate in the election.

On the February 15, Obasanjo's nomination as PDP's presidential candidate was reported, but Obasanjo's speech was not relayed and there was no film footage of the convention at all. On the same day the APP's endorsement of Dr. Ogbonnaya Onu as its presidential candidates was reported for about three minutes and mention was made of AD's deliberation on who to nominate as its presidential candidate.

In the bulletin of the 16th - the adoption of Chief Falae by both APP and AD carried the day with Dr. Onu's protest against his being dropped for Falae. This particular bulletin was unique in that these political stories were in the headline, as against the practice by the station of one political story on the headline.

Obasanjo's choice of Alhaji Atiku Abibakar as his running mate was reported in the bulletin of the 17th. The story was quite balanced and detailed as it also touched on the issue of the vacuum that would be created by the choice.

The bulletins of February 18, and 19, were outstanding as they had twice the usual number of political stories in the headlines and were rich in content. The Presidential debate that saw only Chief Falae showing up was well reported and given adequate airtime of about three minutes.

As to be expected the February 20th bulletin was full of reports on the National Assembly election. The bulletin was dominated by conduct of the elections, reactions of the Head of State and various states administrators on the elections, the turn out of voters and security during the elections.

On the 21st the results started coming in, and MiNAJ gave prominence to results within Anambra State while it continued with reports on the conduct of the elections. The

bulletin was once more dominated by election reports.

The political crisis in Delta State regarding the postponement of the elections in two Senatorial Zones and 16 Federal constituencies by INEC was also relayed. The immediate reaction of Delta State administrator against the postponement and his call on the public to disregard the postponement “because it was unilaterally done by INEC in Delta State without the authority of the Head Quarters”, was reported. By the 22nd, most of the results were released by INEC and broadcast on the station’s news.

Although there were no political stories in the headlines of the bulletin of the 23rd there were about five political news items in the body of the bulletin and three of them were on PDP’s presidential candidate.

On the 24th and 25th, the aftermath of a dispute in APP was given prominence as two of the party’s presidential aspirants whose ambitions were botched switched their supports to PDP’s presidential candidate.

The bulletin of the 26th was filled with INEC’s preparation for the presidential election held the next day. Emphasis was placed on the fact that the election was between APP and PDP and the need for electoral officers to explain the situation to voters at the polling centers.

On February 27th, the conduct of elections and statements of government officials, INEC officials, security agents and voters on the election carried the day. One could read excitement in the voices and faces of the correspondents as they reported on the conduct in various polling centers. The station had reports from most of the states in the federation and also interviewed some observers, both international and local. The reports were quite comprehensive. Results from the states started coming in on the 28th, and this was given prominence in the news broadcast.

Also reported was Falae’s intention to contest the election, which he described as a fraud.

A special programme tagged ‘Election Watch’ was aired by the station on the 20th and 27th, the days of elections. The one on February 20 examined the role of the National Assembly in a democratic political setting. It ran from 1.00p.m to 3.00p.m. There was a panel of analysts who discussed the issue.

The programme, “Political Diary” aired on February analysed the PDP’s convention of February 13 and 14. The programme was aired for about an hour and it looked at the wheeling and dealing during the primaries, the horse-trading and the eventual emergence of General Obasanjo as the presidential candidate. All the presidential aspirants were shown.

An earlier edition of the programme carried a campaign tour by MiNAJ’s chief executive, Chief Mike Ajegbo, who contested the Senatorial seat of Anambra Central.

#### **(v) Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Abuja**

The Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), in Abuja does not have political programmes produced by it. Even in the month of the last lap of the elections slated to take place during the on-going transition programme, NTA Abuja still depended on the network service to feed it with political programmes.

The weekly Network programme, 'Face the Nation' kicked off with a repeat from last month's edition. According to the presenter, the AD representative expected on the February 16 edition of the programme did not show up, so a repeat examining the parties performances in the Gubernatorial elections, by party officials themselves was broadcast.

The February 23 edition of the programme, brought together two political analysts who discussed the National Assembly election and what is expected of members of the House. While the analysts gave objective and fair opinions on the performances of the parties, the moderator also steered the discussions in the right directions and gave incisive answers or responses to audience's questions or comments.

On February 13, the PDP convention was covered with copious use of actuality for about 1 minute 37 seconds. But the APP convention was given about 2 minutes 35 seconds. There were, however, more stories on PDP convention than that of APP, running from February 12 to 15.

The station also tried to get details of the crisis in APP as they carried the different sides of the stories, those on a disappointed presidential aspirant, Dr. Saraki, on one hand, and on the other hand the statements and explanations by the party's chairman, Alhaji Ibrahim Waziri.

Stories on INEC also got prominence on the news broadcast as activities by or relating to the commission were diligently covered and reported. INEC's reaction to the APP/AD alliance was given adequate coverage.

On the election days – February 20 and 27, reports from correspondents from all over the nation were broadcast and this was very comprehensive. Also news on the conduct of the elections in various states were also broadcast.

The news reports on the elections were also objective and no candidate was given more airtime than the others. The Head of State and states administrators were shown visiting polling stations, and either casting their votes or making efforts to cast their votes.

'Nigerians Decide', a programme only broadcast on election days, courtesy NTA Network, also afforded the people of Abuja an opportunity to receive civic education. The 3-hour civic education programme of February 27, brought experts together to discuss the voting pattern in the presidential elections, analyses the trends and what its potentials for

the nation would be. Included in the programme was the news report on the elections, its conduct in various states and the problems encountered by some voters. On the 27th February issue, the analysts spoke on changes and shift in the voting pattern and the voter turn out. There was no analysis on any party whatsoever or any candidate, just the trends in voting. So the programme could not be either favourable or unfavourable to any party or candidate.

**(vi) Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Kaduna**

Political broadcast on Nigerian Television Authority in Kaduna for the month of February was not quite different from the previous month. The broadcast started off on a low key with scanty political stories on the news items. But just before the middle of the month, there was a staggering increase in political stories. This might be attributed to the National Assembly and Presidential elections that came up on February 20 and 27, respectively.

The APP and PDP's conventions which both held during the weekend of February 13 - 14, were well reported during the 7p.m news tagged "Periscope", a 30 minutes news broadcast. The station tried to achieve a balance in the coverage of both events and there was insignificant difference in the lengths of the stories.

However, on the 15th, during the news report of the winners of APP and PDP's presidential primaries, the report emphasized that the APP convention was chaotic and rowdy as against that of PDP which was quite orderly. Some people were also asked to remark on the conduct of the two primaries, in respect of the organisation and orderliness. This portrayed the APP in bad light.

The news broadcast of February 20 was mainly on the National Assembly election, which took place on that day. There were reports from all over the federation. The people's comments were the same as they all agreed that the election was characterized by a low voter turnout. The broadcast recorded interviews with the Head of State, Kaduna State Administrator, INEC resident commissioner, Human Rights activists, an executive of the Association of Women and political analysts. It was also comprehensive.

On the 16th, the station still on political news items, had two political stories on the headlines out of the three carried. The court suit over the conduct of APP's presidential primaries and the Kaduna State's inauguration of a committee on the transition to civil rule were given prominence. The screening of the presidential and vice-presidential candidates was also reported, and the absence of one of the Vice-Presidential candidate, Alhaji Umaru Skinkafi of APP at the screening ceremony.

The station's periscope of February 22 was also dominated by political news items.

The conduct of the National Assembly election held two days earlier was reviewed while reasons were canvassed for the low turn out of voters at the elections. There were about five political news items in this 20-minute broadcast. The reports on the National Assembly elections were not accompanied by actuality/footage.

The campaign tour of General Obasanjo, PDP's Presidential candidate to Kaduna State was also featured on the news, but without any picture. However, the APP Presidential candidate, Chief Falae's visit to Kaduna was not featured at all.

One day to the Presidential elections, the news bulletin was filled with political stories. The station relayed a story on a workshop held to educate women on their rights to vote and participate in the politics.

On the 27th, the 'News Periscope' included 'Dateline '99' and ran for an hour. It reported the conduct of the elections in various parts of the country, especially Kaduna State. It was quite detailed. On the 'Dateline' segment, the problem of under-aged voters and the issue of low voter turn out, were examined by two political analysts.

The 'Dateline', acted as civic education to the audience, but only to the educated ones. While the news periscope is usually repeated in Hausa language, to satisfy the uneducated, the dateline was broadcast only in the English language. So it catered for the need of a privileged few in the society.

Earlier on the 27th, at precisely 11.00a.m there was an edition of 'Dateline '99' where political analysts were interviewed on the then on-going presidential elections. It ran till noon. The news broadcast, which formed a part of the programme, reported stories on conduct of the elections and INEC's level of preparedness for the election. Analysts on the 'Dateline' segment discussed the election procedure and the implication it would have on the Nigerian people. Individuals on the streets were also asked to express their views on the conduct of the elections.

'Enduring Polity', a political programme on the station, also interviewed representatives of the three political parties in the state. The editions aired in February were considerably well handled by the moderator and he did not allow the programme to degenerate into an argument or debate amongst the party representatives.

"Nigerians Decide", a programme only broadcast on election days, courtesy NTA Network, also afforded the people of Kaduna State an opportunity to receive civic education.

The 3-hour civic education programme of February 27, brought experts together to discuss the voting pattern in the presidential elections, analyse the trends and what its potentials for the nation would be. Included in the programme was the news report on the elections, its conduct in various states and the problems encountered by some voters. On

the 27th February issue, the analysts spoke on changes and shift in the voting pattern and the voter turn out. There was no analysis on any party whatsoever or any candidate, just the trends in voting. So the programme could not be either favourable or unfavourable to any party or candidate.

## **7. ANALYSIS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **(a) ANALYSIS**

#### **(i) Radio Nigeria, Abuja**

On the Network service of the FRCN, there were four news broadcasts of thirty minutes each everyday at 7.00am, 4.00pm, 7.00pm and 10.00pm. There was a fifteen minutes political programme called 'Platform' broadcast at 7:30pm on Mondays and Thursdays at the same time. There was the special programme called 'Election Special'. It was broadcast twice this month for a total of seven hours: 12-2pm and 5-6:30pm on Sunday 21st and Sunday 28th. There was also broadcast on the Network service a Vice-Presidential debate for one hour and Presidential interviews for each presidential candidate which was for one hour each. This came to three hours of debate.

Thirty minutes of news four times everyday for 28 days comes to 56 hours of news broadcast. 'Platform' was on air for two hours during the month of February. Thirty minutes of news bulletin on the network service will contain about eight items of news (i.e. about four minutes an item). The fifty-six hours of news broadcast in February would, therefore, have contained an average of 840 items of news.

There were 108 news items pertaining to elections and the transition programme. This approximates to about seven hours out of the fifty-six hours of news broadcast or 13 per cent of the entire broadcast of news in February.

Given our categorisation of news items, that is those relating to the transition programme, into Government officials' statements and activities, Election activity, Campaign and Civic Education, of these 108 political news items, 47 were on INEC election activities like preparation for elections and screening of candidates. Government officials' statements and activities relating to elections and the transition programme constituted 27 items. Civic Education items related to voter education and mobilising the electorate for participation in the election, constituted 25 items, while campaign activities and presentation of party and individual manifestoes, accounted for 9 items

Of the seven hours of political news broadcast for February, we find that election activities and government officials' statements and activities took five hours (47+27 items x 4 minutes), leaving only two hours for Civic Education and campaign items.

Inadequate as this might be in the overall picture of the news broadcast for the month, given the power of radio to educate and mobilise a largely rural population, the picture or situation is much improved. This is so if we recall that during the month under review, we had three hours of Vice-Presidential and Presidential candidates' debate and interviews, respectively. This falls within the ambit of civic and voter education.

In these bulletins for the month of February, the PDP was mentioned 20 times, all in a positive light or at best neutral. The APP was mentioned 15 times, five of them negative. This may be as a result of their problems. The AD was mentioned five times, two of them positive and three, neutral.

There were important political news stories, which were not reflected in the bulletins either by error or commission. Seven of such items were APP related news stories. The PDP had four, while the AD had three. Non-partisan stories, which had voter education value but not reflected, were five.

Partisan jingles on the Network service was dominated by the PDP. One week to every election, they had their jingles of sixty seconds played twice in a bulletin. It costs about N92,000.00 to play it once. The APP would have two played for the entire period before elections. AD had none. Money obviously played the important role here on account of the commercialisation policy of the station.

#### **(ii) Ray Power 100.5FM**

Ray Power during the month under review devoted a considerable airtime to political stories and issues. Specifically, it reported extensively on the various interest groups in the transition programme, both the active and passive participants.

Specific mention should be made of some programmes, which were not only timely, but equally educative. One such interesting programme is 'Your Rights and Duties', a civic education programme aired on Saturdays. During the month under review, the programme did a lot of enlightenment on voting procedures and what a disenfranchised voter can do instead of resorting to violence. The presenter also enlivened the programme by inviting guests who briefed listeners on the need to vote as well as the role of law enforcement agencies in the democratic process.

It is noted that topics treated in 'Factfile' were timely and relevant. The feedback from the station's listeners reflects the high regard accorded the programme. However, the presenters should try to maintain the ethical focus of the programme in the light of the frequent emotional outbursts of some respondents to the programme.

Ray Power displayed an appreciable level of fairness in its coverage of political events in February. Though there were instances of more airtime given to PDP as against

the AD/APP and more favourable stories for PDP. This could not be taken as conclusive evidence of favouritism or biased reporting. This situation can only be attributed to the fact that candidates and PDP as a party spent more money on campaigns. In fact, investigation revealed that for the live broadcast of the PDP Jos convention, DAAR Communications Limited, owners of Ray Power and AIT has put before the party a bill of N12 million.

It has been observed that news bulletins on weekends were not as regular and as formal as on weekdays. Most of the time, news bulletins, if they feature at all, came as brief interruptions during music programmes.

Another observation was the haphazard arrangement of political stories. This is a minus on its news judgement style. On February 18, on its 6.00pm news, good political stories were buried in the bulletin. For instance, a story on PDP Presidential candidate, General Obasanjo, came after a sports story about Flying Eagles Coach's inclusion of former players in his team.

An example of biased reporting was the February 24 story that Dr. Saraki and his group in the APP had authorised his supporters to vote for General Obasanjo of the PDP in the Presidential Elections of February 27. The story was given prominence during the 4.00pm and 6.00pm bulletins. Ray Power went ahead to air a BBC report on the same day, in which Dr. Saraki expressed his displeasure about the AD/APP Alliance as well as his instruction that his followers should vote for PDP. BBC followed this up in 'Focus on Africa' with the report of the tumultuous welcome of General Obasanjo to Ilorin, the Kwara State Capital.

All these reports favoured General Obasanjo of the PDP. It is regrettable that no attempt was made to get the APP side to the story. The stories were so one-sided and unfair.

### **(iii) African Independent Television (AIT) Lagos State**

The station must be commended for the devotion of its airtime to political issues during the month under review. The new political programmes introduced months before to specifically take care of political reporting during this transition process continued on air. Also, most of its other programmes, like the months before, paid significant attention to political matters.

Still the observation made in our previous report concerning the timing of some of the political programmes referred to above was not corrected. "Issues in Democracy" still continue on air at 6.30 p.m. when most Lagosians were still in their offices or on their way home thereby missing the programme.

However, AIT needs to be commended specially for the live broadcast of PDP Jos

convention. This remains a solid achievement in Nigeria's broadcast history. It is, however, noted that investigations revealed that for the live broadcast of the PDP Jos convention, DAAR Communications Limited, owners of Ray Power and AIT has put before the party a bill of N12 million.

This is against provisions of Decree No. 35 of 1998, which set legal boundaries of election reporting in Nigeria. The decree in Paragraph 7.8 prohibits the commercialisation of political news or coverage in the interest of fairness and balance.

#### **(iv) MiNAJ System Television, Obosi, Anambra State**

The number of exclusive stories on PDP this month was higher than on the other parties. The party carried the month with about 24 stories relating to it out of the 96 political news items monitored on the station's main news programme, "The World Tonight". APP got nine exclusive mentions and AD two, the lowest number of coverage. The number of stories on AD, although ridiculously low, was expected as it had formed an alliance with APP. The presidential candidate nominated under AD, Chief Olu Falae contested the election on the ticket of APP. Hence stories concerning the candidate were relayed on the platform of APP. Still, the exclusive mentions of AD and APP put together is not up to half of PDP. In addition, the stories were also more favourable to PDP.

News items relating to the three parties jointly were about 8 and those pertaining to INEC were 21. Political stories pertaining to government officials' activities and pronouncements were 20.

In terms of direct political stories, once more, PDP had more publicity on this station than other parties. The alliance between the APP and AD notwithstanding, PDP still overshadowed them. This is attributable to four factors - the party's winning streak, the fact that the Governor-elect of Anambra State is of that party, the fact of Chief Ajegbo, chief executive of the station being of the party and fourthly, the party, PDP, spent a more money than the others.

There were about 13 news items on voter education out of 96 political news items aired by the station. The station generated six out of the 13-voter education news while the others were from INEC and the Government on mobilisation of the electorate for participation in the elections.

The station did not broadcast much political stories concerning localities out side its base, not even concerning its neighbour, Rivers State, quite unlike the previous month. In its bulletin of February 8, while it carried only two political news item, a lot of other political stories were ignored. Those include, the APP presidential aspirants meeting in Abuja, the endorsement of Alabo Graham Douglas as PDP Presidential aspirant for the

South/South, even though it reported the eventual emergence of Chief Olu Falae of AD, as the party's candidate.

Also missed was the story on Delta State's administrator's warning to politicians in the state that they would be held responsible for any act of violence perpetrated by their supporters. This was relayed on the 10th by other broadcast stations. Considering the fact that Delta State is so close to Anambra State, where MiNAJ is situated, this implies some laxity in the gathering and dissemination of information on the part of the station.

**(v) Nigerian Television Authority, (NTA), Abuja**

News stories on the political parties' candidates did not show any favoritism of one party over another. The number of stories reported about one party was more than others, but generally, no deliberate negative report of any party could be deciphered in any of the stories.

But given that the presidential election was just four days away, the focus on National Assembly on February 23 should have been on the forth coming elections. The two presidential candidates or their representatives ought to have been invited to face the nation and answer questions from callers.

The news report of the station was very detailed with more than 20 news items on the elections and matters relating to it.

Campaign tours by both presidential candidates were given fair coverage.

PDP had more political news items relating to it and its candidate more than the other parties and their candidates. It was followed by APP and as has become the pattern, followed by AD.

The political news items on NTA Abuja, courtesy NTA network, for the month of February was quite impressive. Most of the news items were on political issues and events. Stories on the APP/AD alliance ruled the waves for quite a long time.

Generally, the political news reports and programmes on NTA Abuja still left its viewers undernourished information-wise as the station had nothing for its viewers in the capital territory. It's the same old story, knowing a little in the nation politics in every state in the nation and nothing much about Abuja.

The objectivity or not of the presenters is also difficult to ascertain as they do not present any political programme.

**(vi) Nigerian Television Authority, (NTA), Kaduna**

The PDP and APP seemed to have equal publicity regarding news items on NTA Kaduna, but reports were generally more favourable to PDP than other parties. For example, the report on "chaotic" APP's convention as the station described it, came immediately

after the PDP's "orderly" convention. This portrayed APP in negative light to the audience, but one cannot blame the station though as it only reported what went on at the convention.

The negligible mention of AD could be due to the fact that the party had formed an alliance with APP and its candidate contested the election under the ticket of APP. Another reason could be that AD never had a strong base in Kaduna. Still, the publicity given PDP surpassed that given to APP and AD put together.

It was also observed that most of the political stories were either on INEC or generated from the commission and this served as a form of civic education for its audience, an ingredient greatly lacking in the station's political programmes.

Even on the "Enduring Polity" edition of the 18th, a lot of emphasis was placed on the problems within the APP resulting from its convention, rather than the respective parties preparation for the National Assembly elections – the main issue advertised for discussion. This also presented APP in a negative light.

On February 22, while the station reported the campaign tour of PDP's presidential candidate, General Obasanjo to Kaduna, it did not report that of the APP's presidential candidate, Chief Olu Falac.

The station should, however, be commended for boosting their political reports by the second week in February and maintaining it till the end of the month and also for relaying the news in Hausa.

'Dateline '99', aired on election dates apart from increasing the duration of the news broadcast also gave the audience and members of the public opportunity to air their views on conduct of elections and be better informed on the process of elections.

There were not many advertisements placed on the station and the few placed in the month of February were by some presidential aspirants, mainly from PDP.

The station, however, did not do much by way of voter education. Aside from reports on some organization having workshops to educate women on voting and politics in general, the station did not on its own work on news ideas aimed at educating the voters. Such ideas would have been helpful to a lot of their viewers, especially in a state where the illiteracy level is rather high.

On the usage of actuality and footage, the station usually carry current pictures, but sometimes, like that of February 26, News Periscope, some of the footage used were a couple of days old and not as up to date as the stories featured.

## **(ii) CONCLUSION**

Like in the previous month, a straight and general conclusion on the performance of

the broadcast media in the month under review in every department will not be adequate to convey the true performance of the sector for the month.

While some broadcast stations monitored performed quite remarkably, some performed below expectations. In another vein, while some of the broadcast stations considered to have performed well in some areas, the same could not be said of them in some other areas.

For the second month running, NTA Abuja could not be adjudged to have performed above average in its coverage of the political transition programme. This is especially in relation to the station's focus on political issue which was generally low. Its allocation of airtime to the different political parties showed minimal disparities, but generally fair. It continued, however, to starve its viewers of grass-root political report. But its counterpart, NTA Kaduna, maintained its previous month standard still with a slight pro-PDP and, specifically, General Obasanjo bias.

Ray Power tried to be objective in its report. But it, however, failed in a few instances. One of such is with respect to INEC Chairman Justice Ephraim Akpata who warned on February 10 that the body would not accept dictations over the way it conducts its affairs.

Also is the chairman's dismissal of the AD/APP Alliance as against INEC's regulations, which reaction was a negative story to the AD/APP, but regrettably, no report was filed on the response of the AD/APP to Akpata's warning. There were also a few isolated instances of unequal airtime allocation to parties particularly PDP.

Equally considered a minus is the station's attitude of burying important political news stories among less important ones. With respect to X-ray it is infrequent and not always detailed. For example, on its episode of February 24, one would have expected a detailed appraisal of Presidential Elections as the most important of the elections and expectations of the electorate judging from lapses of the past. Such was not the case.

More research on the likely questions and answers by the electorate and from the politicians is required.

However, while commending the relevance of 'Factfile' and 'Your Rights and Duties', it is regrettable that certain programmes relevant to political education which featured previously disappeared from the station's programme schedule. These include 'Political Update', which used to provide an overview of political developments in the country, and 'Political Platform' which provided the avenues for notable politicians to air their views.

The unprecedented marathon coverage of the PDP Jos convention by AIT and Ray-Power is a major plus for the broadcast media. However, investigations revealed that DAAR Communications presented a bill of N12m to PDP for the live broadcast of the event

through its radio and television stations so Nigerians could witness the primaries.

For MiNAJ System Television, its broadcast for the month was paradoxically not as commendable as the previous month especially with respect to airtime allocation to parties.

But on the average it can not be said to have been a bad outing. Despite the low start, it was to record as much as 10 political news stories in a day in its main news slot.

However, there was a clear pro-PDP tilt by the station and a disturbing decline in the attention it paid to news from neighbouring states. But that could be as a result of news judgement, which is solely the responsibility of the correspondent and his editor.

For Radio Nigeria, Abuja, it was an incredibly a fruitful outing during the month under review . It could however have done more but for its commercialisation policy.

In conclusion the month recorded generally higher airtime devotion to political stories and issues than the previous month. If not for any other thing but for the two very important elections that took place during the month.

While this might probably be cheering a news, not so the fact that all the broadcast stations monitored had more focus on PDP and its candidates than on other parties. And more, most of the stations were pro-PDP in terms of favorable reports.

Furthermore, save for NTA Abuja to a lesser extent, all the broadcast stations monitored gave some political parties more than one hour per week air time during the month under review. This is a negation of the provisions of Decree No. 35 of 1998 which stipulates that political party broadcast should not exceed one hour per week per stations, 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.

Secondly, in the area of air time with respect to jingles the decree stipulates that this should not exceed 60 seconds and no voice of a member of staff of the broadcast station is to be used.

While this was adhered to regarding the non-use of a broadcast station staff's voice, this was not so with respect to air time for jingles. Most jingles exceeded 60 seconds and were relayed as many as 15 times in a day in some cases.

Lastly, but not the least the commercialisation policy of the broadcast media made some parties and most candidates unable to have access to the electorate while others monopolised air time because of their superior money power.

### **(iii) Recommendations**

In view of the above analysis and conclusion, we, therefore, recommend as follows:

\* 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 ban on live debates and provisions of Decree No. 35 of 1998 which limits to one hour at the most for political broadcast by a party per station.

\* 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.

\* 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.

\* Also, it is recommended that election being over, special political programmes introduced as a result of the transition elections should now be focused on discussing such other issues as accountability in governance, loyal or opposition, allegation of electoral fraud and post election democratic development.

## **Error Margin**

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



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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