

EXECUTIVE

WATCH

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



JUNE 2000

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

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This is the Tenth report under the Executive Watch Project of Media Rights Agenda, a non governmental organisation established for the purpose of promoting and protecting press freedom and freedom of expression.

Media Rights Agenda is a member of the Transition Monitoring Group (T.M.G) a coalition of human rights, non-governmental and civil society organisations formed in August 1998 for the purpose of developing integrity in the electoral process by monitoring on the prosecution of the political programme.

Under the Executive Watch project, Media Rights Agenda monitors the activities and policies of the Executive arm of government particularly the Presidency, to ascertain the popularity such activities and policies enjoy among a wide spectrum of Nigerians.

This report was written by **Osaro Odemwingie**, Publications Officer for M.R.A., while **Ademoyewa Johnson**, Campaign Officer at M.R.A., conducted the research exercise for the report. **Mercy Epete Jones**, Litigation Officer at M.R.A. provided the secretarial services for the report.

The project is supervised by **Edetaen Ojo**, M.R.A.'s Executive Director.

EXECUTIVE WATCH

INTRODUCTION

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

The overall objective of the project is to monitor our nascent democracy by keeping track of the Executive's performance and popularity and serve as a feedback to the government to enable it serve Nigerians better.

The monitoring exercise is being carried out on a monthly basis and it involves identification of some major policy decisions, comments and actions of the Executive, particularly President Olusegun Obasanjo, during the preceding months.

This tenth report under this project addresses the state pardon granted Alhaji Salisu Buhari the former speaker of House of Representatives who was convicted on charges of forgery and perjury by an Abuja magistrate court last year. The respondents in this report are limited to the Lagos area. It is, however, hoped that this shall be broadened in future to include respondents from other states of the federation including the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

Lagosians condemned Buhari's Pardon, Says It should Be Revoked.

A majority of Lagosians want President Olusegun Obasanjo to revoke the state pardon granted Alhaji Salisu Buhari the former speaker of the house of Representatives who was convicted on charges of forgery and perjury by an Abuja magistrate court last year. According to them, the pardon granted Alhaji Buhari less than a year after being convicted of forgery and perjury has affected the confidence they have in anti-corruption campaigns by the administration.

These views are the outcome of a survey carried out by Media Rights Agenda. The survey was conducted between June 2 and 10 of June 2000, and it involved the administration of 800 questionnaires comprising four close-ended questions with a 'Yes' or 'No' options.

It would be recalled that Alhaji Buhari was on June 1, 2000 granted state pardon by President Obasanjo alongside 14 others. This has generated a lot of reactions from Nigerians over the justification for the President's action.

The first question sought to know if respondents thought President Obasanjo was justified in granting Alhaji Buhari the pardon.

The second question asked respondents to state with a if the presidential pardon granted Alhaji Salisu has affected their confidence in the ethical revolution and anti-corruption campaigns by the administration.

Question three sought to know if respondents want Alhaji Buhari to be called back to the House of Representatives. Lastly, question four asked respondents who do not support the President's pardon for Alhaji Buhari if they would want the pardon to be revoked.

The questionnaires were distributed to people of diverse educational background. These include people with only primary school education or no formal education at all, those up to Post primary level, and Post secondary education background in the ratio of 150,200 and 450 respectively.

Of the 800 questionnaires distributed, 610 were returned and 190 were not returned. This shows a return rate of 76.3 per cent and 23.7 per cent mortality rate respectively.

From the total of 610 respondents, 110 of them are in the sub- group of respondents with at most a Primary school educational background, 140 belong to respondents with Post-primary educational background and 450 others belong to the group of respondents with Post- secondary educational background.

All the 610 respondents or 100 per cent said President Obasanjo was not justified in granting Alhaji Buhari state pardon.

Asked if the presidential pardon granted Alhaji Buhari has negatively affected the confidence respondents have in the ethical revolution and anti-corruption crusades of the administration, 553 respondents representing 90.7 per cent said the pardon had negatively affected their confidence, while 57 respondents representing 9.3 per cent said it did not.

On the question whether the respondents would support Alhaji Buhari being called back to the House of Representatives, all 610 respondents, representing 100 per cent, said they do not support the idea of his return to the House of Representatives.

However, respondents differ on whether the presidential pardon should be revoked or not. Four hundred and twenty five respondents, representing 69.7 per cent, want the pardon to be revoked, while 185 respondents representing 30.3 per cent said the pardon should not be revoked.

BACKGROUND

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

Some people would however consider Alexandra Pope’s position to be an exercise in sterile academism. To them, democracy is the beacon of good governance. This is essentially so for two basic reasons. The first is because of the elaborate provisions it makes for the psychological appeasement of the people by way of giving them the dignity of having been given a say in deciding who does, or who does not, govern them. It is obviously with this at the back of his mind that former American President Abraham Lincoln defined democracy as a “government of the people by the people for the people.” The other reason is the checks and balances provided for leaders in a democratic setting.

These make democracy the chief appeal as a form of government to many people all over the world.

Hence several countries of the world are fast embracing democratic rule. It is believed that autocratic rule is archaic, barbaric and old fashioned. This was one of the basis for the Africa leaders at the 35th O.A.U Summit in the Algerian Capital of Algiers to pass an anti-coup resolution which says any government that comes to power in any African country through a coup d-etat, would be diplomatically isolated. In effect such a leader, would not be admitted as a member of O.A.U.

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

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

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

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

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

OBJECTIVES

That Nigerian recently passed through one its most trying periods in her political history is not debatable. With that experience in mind, and a desire to ensure the success of the present civilian democratic government,

Media Rights Agenda (MRA) is undertaking to monitor some major activities and policies of President Olusegun Obasanjo the aims of which are:

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

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

JUSTIFICATION FOR THE TOPIC

Alhaji Salisu Buhari stood election in Nasarawa federal constituency of Kano state into the House of Representatives. He became the speaker of the house. It was however revealed that he had stood election with falsified credentials in addition to being under the legal age for the position.

After an unsuccessful effort to deny and hush-up the allegations, Alhaji Buhari confessed guilty and resigned from the House. He was subsequently tried and was convicted on charges of forgery and perjury by an Abuja magistrate court, he was however granted pardon by President Obasanjo alongside 14 others on June 1, 2000. This has generated a lot of reactions from Nigerians over the justification for the President's action, especially if the action has to be reconciled with the recent ethical revolution and anti-corruption campaigns by the administration.

METHODOLOGY

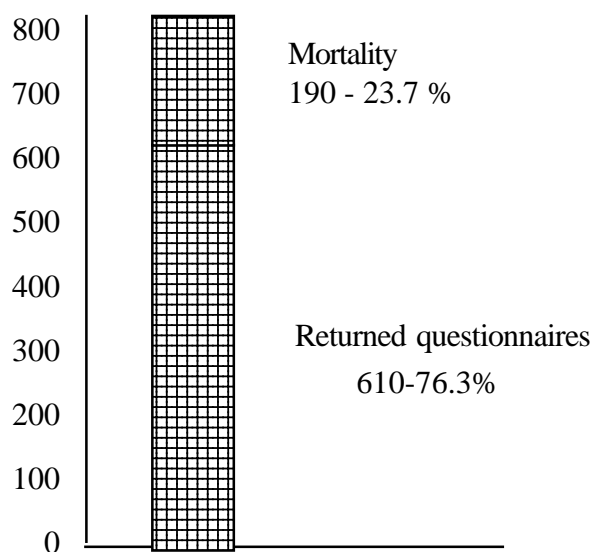
- This is the tenth report under this project and response sampling is restricted to Lagos State.
- It involves the administration of structured questionnaires of four questions.
- The sample comprises 800 respondents aged between 18 years and above both male and female.
- The sample is made up of three sub-groups of persons which include people with non-formal education /those who attained primary school level, post-primary school level, and post-secondary school level.
- The three sub-groups are represented in the sample in the ratio of 150, 200 and 450 respectively in the questionnaire,
- The sub-group of non-formal education/primary school level was assisted by MRA's researchers to read and interpret the questions and elect appropriate options according to the preferences of the respondents concerned.

PRESENTATION OF RESULT

ACHIEVED SAMPLE

Sample sizes Sample groups	Nos of questionnaires administered	Nos of questionnaires recieved and %	Nos of questionnaires not received and %
Non formal/primary school level	150	110 73.3%	40 26.7%
Post primary education	200	140 70%	60 30%
Post secondary education	450	360 80 %	90 20%
Grand Total	Cummulative % 800	Cummulative % 610 76.3%	Cummulative % 190 23.7%

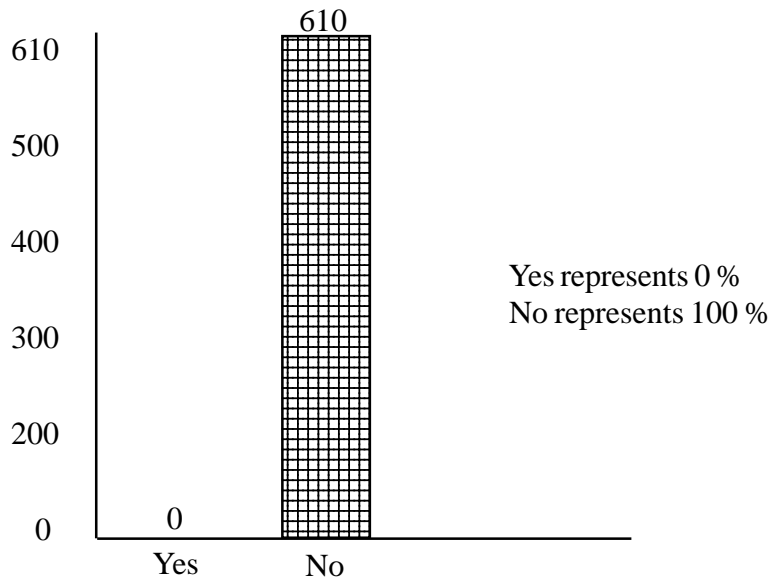
QUESTIONNAIRE RATE OF RETURN / MORTALITY



Q1a. Do you think President Obasanjo is justified in granting Alhaji Salisu Buhari pardon?

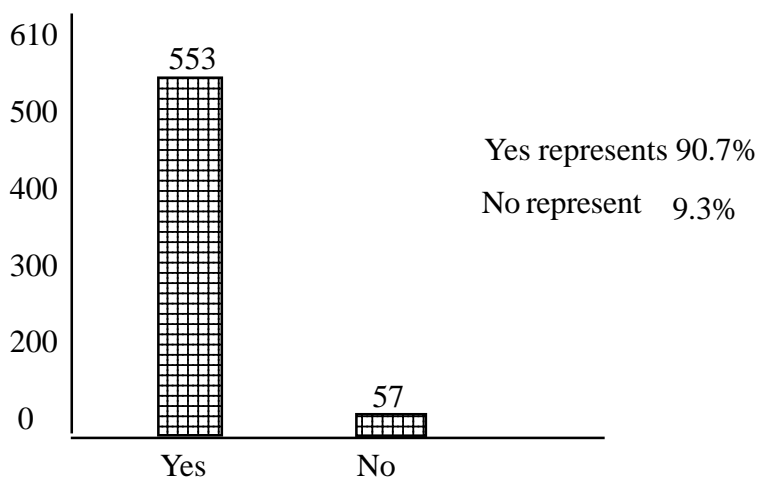
Yes or No

AGGREGATE RESPONSE



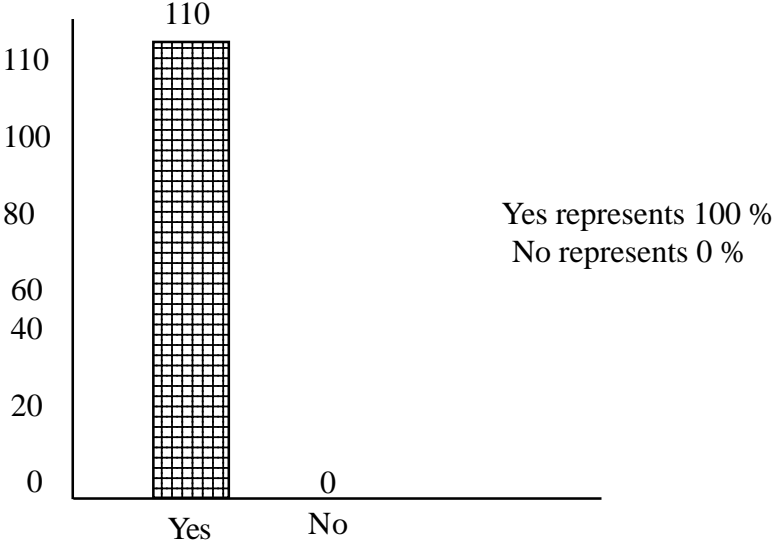
Q2. Has the state pardon granted Alhaji Salisu Buhari for a serious offence committed less than one year affected your confidence in the ethical revolution and anti-corruption campaigns by the administration? Yes or No

AGGREGATE RESPONSE

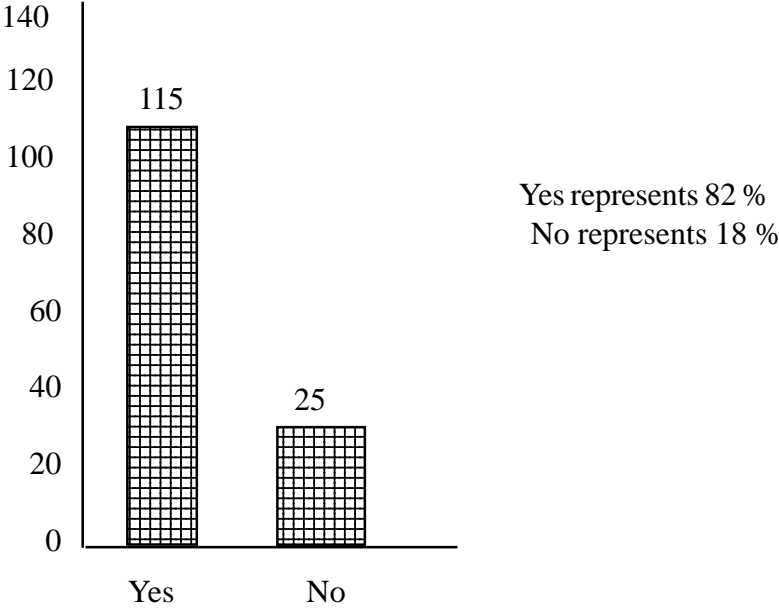


Group Responses

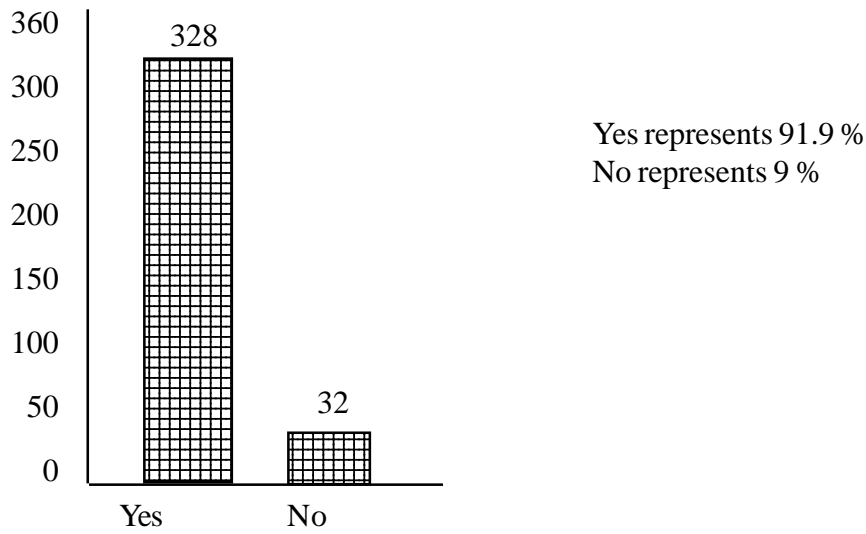
No Formal/Primary Education



Secondary Education

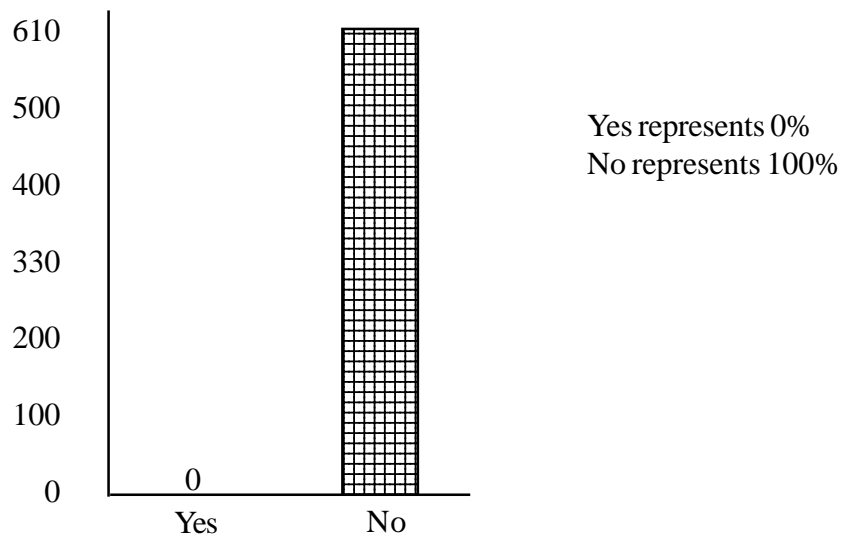


Post Secondary Education



Q3. In spite of your answer to the above question, do you support Alhaji Buhari being recalled to the House of Representatives? Yes or No

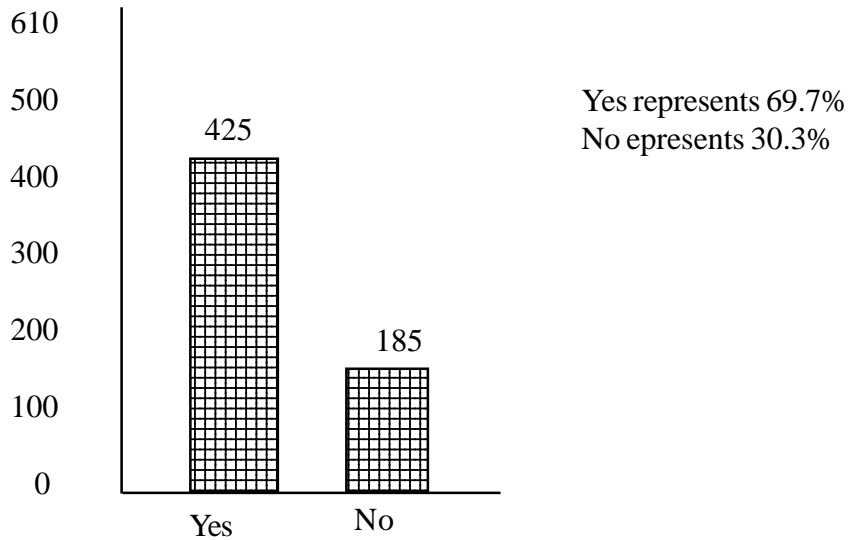
AGGREGATE RESPONSES



Q4. If you do not support it, would you want that the pardon be revoked?

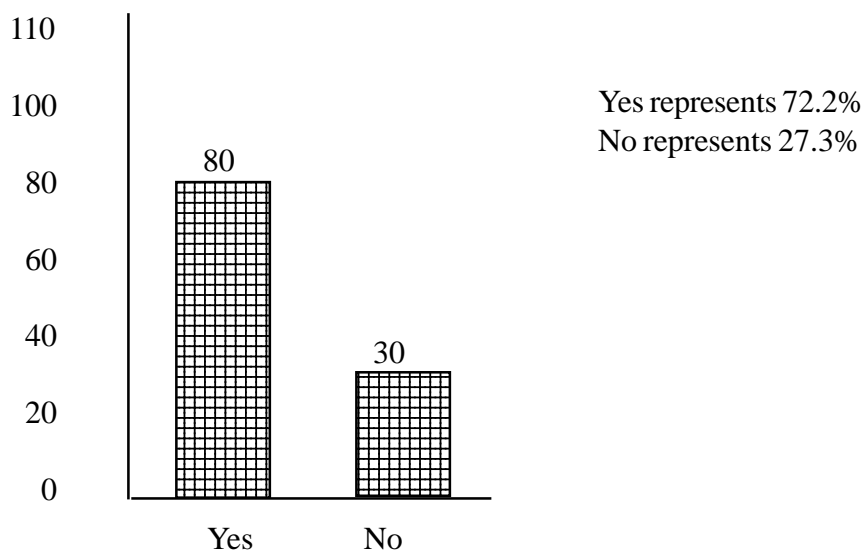
Yes or No

AGGREGATE RESPONSE

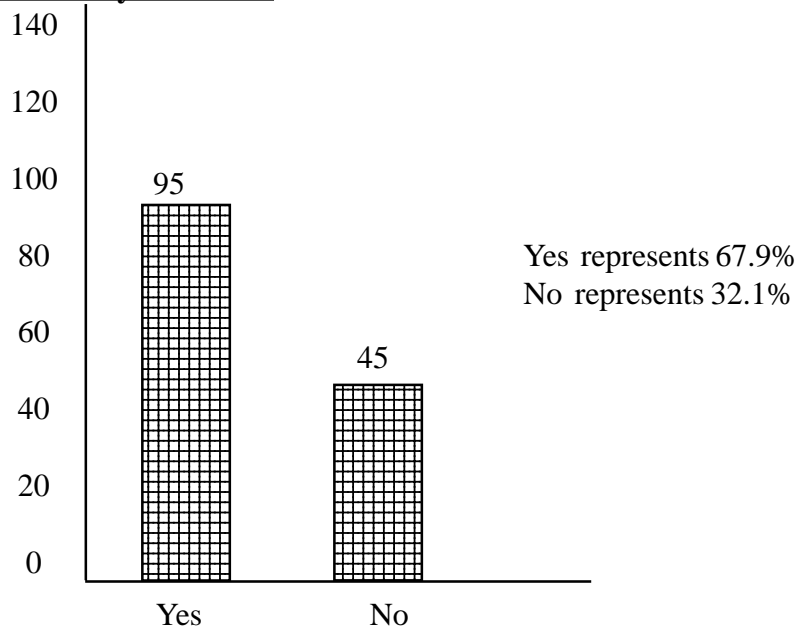


Group Responses

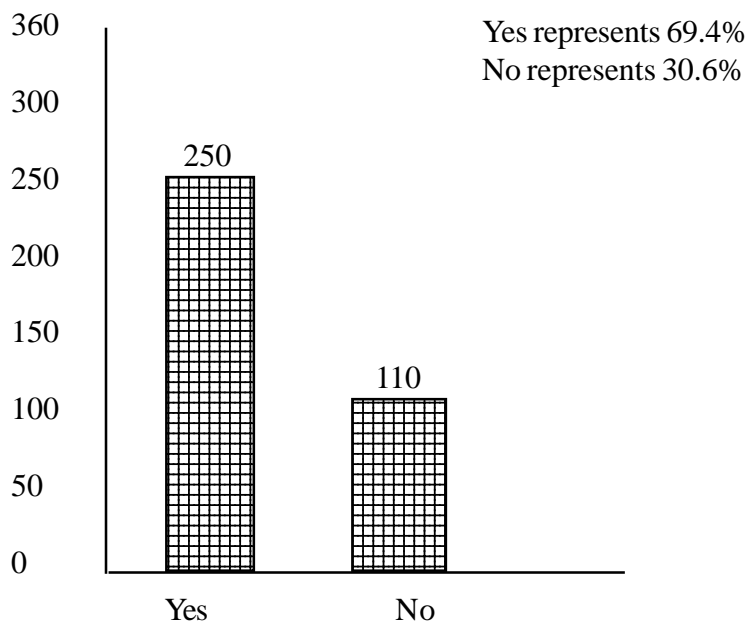
No Formal/Primary Education



Secondary Education



Post Secondary Education





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

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

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