

Media Scorecard

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



1999

April

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

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Transition Programme.

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PREFACE

This report of the print media coverage of the political programme, the fourth in the series, was conducted by **Media Rights Agenda** (MRA), a non governmental organisation established for the purpose of promoting and protecting press freedom and freedom of expression in Nigeria.

The aims are to examine the extent of fairness exhibited by the print media in giving each political party free, equal and uninhibited access to air their views.

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.

As was with the February and March 1999 reports, we have here in this report, carried out our monitoring exercise on 10 national newspapers and four news feature magazines.

The variables which hitherto formed the basis of our analysis have all been changed. The reason stems from the fact that all the elections slated to be conducted under the on-going transition programme having all been conducted, new issues now dominate political discourse. These have accordingly formed the basis of our variables and hence analysis.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This report was written by **Osaro Odemwingie**, Publications Officer for MRA. **Michael Ogwo**, Programme Officer and Researcher at MRA conducted the monitoring exercise for the report with the assistance of **Mercy Jones Epete** and **Ademoyewa Johnson**. **Bunmi Oke** provided secretarial services for the project.

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

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1 INTRODUCTION

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

It is based on the monitoring of selected newspapers to assess the coverage of political issues during the period between March 1 and March 31, 1999.

The report focuses on the coverage of the political programme by ten major independent and state-owned or controlled national newspapers. Those that are state-owned are *The New Nigerian* and *Daily Times* newspapers. The independent newspapers include: *The Guardian*, *This Day*, *Concord*, *Vanguard*, *The Diet*, *Post Express*, *Champion* and *The Punch* newspapers.

In addition, four weekly news feature magazines, all privately -owned, were monitored. These are *TELL*, *The Source*, *Newswatch* and *The News*.

(a) BASIS OF MONITORING EXERCISE

In the pilot report of this project, we established the legal basis for fair and effective coverage of electoral processes which derives from a variety of regional and international human rights instruments, particularly those provisions which protect the rights of peoples to freely choose their leaders and to receive information.¹

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

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

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

Gaining access to information during a campaign is an extension of the right of citizens to be well informed and hold and express opinions about their governments' activities generally.

(b) FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

A detailed discussion of the basis of this monitoring exercise was undertaken in the first report in this series published in January 1999. An abridged version of it was contained in the second report

1. See *Media Scorecard - Report of the Print Media Coverage of the Political Transition Programme - January and February 1999*.

published in February 1999.²

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

(c) OBJECTIVES OF EXERCISE

As in the previous reports of this project, the objectives of this monitoring remain:

- 1) To monitor the coverage by the print media of political and human rights issues in the run up to the presidential elections and until the transition programme comes to an end, to ascertain:
 - a. The extent of coverage given to political and human rights issues by state-owned and independent national newspapers and news magazines, in terms of the space devoted to such issues, the kind of issues that are covered, as well as those left out and how comprehensively events relating to them are reported and analysed.
 - b. The pattern of reporting of events pertaining to government officials on state-owned newspapers such as the prominence given to them, allocation of space to opposition figures to provide different view-points from official positions.
 - c. The fairness of allocation of news space to various political parties in relation to each other and relative to the space given to government officials in independent and state-owned newspapers and magazines, as well as how these impact on the political process.
 - d. How much coverage is given to issues and events affecting rural and illiterate populations of the society?
- 2) To provide a barometer for the print media to measure their performance in reporting on human rights and political issues and undertake adjustments to bring themselves in conformity with international standards of fairness in the coverage of such issues.
- 3) To publish regular reports which will draw attention to patterns of inequitable reporting, inadequacy of political coverage, and provide a framework upon which a programme of reforms in the newspaper and magazine industries can be embarked upon.
- 4) To provide a basis upon which the in-coming democratically elected civilian government in Nigeria can undertake comprehensive legal and structural reforms in the regulation of newspapers

2. *ibid*

and magazines in order to enhance the democratic process.

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

2 GENERAL CONSIDERATION FOR PRINT MEDIA MONITORING

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

(a) Government

Considering the anxiety and suspicions of Nigerians regarding the sincerity of the military to relinquish power, analysis is made of governments' actions to determine its impartiality in conducting the political programme. This is specifically in relation to government's actions, or its failures, to ensure the media's right to gather and impart information.

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

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

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

(b) The Press

Having due regards to the objectives of this exercise as outlined above, and considering the fact that developments in the political arena have gone beyond electioneering politicking, considerations for monitoring the press has been slightly altered. The condition for print media monitoring for this report now include:

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

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

An assessment of how the government acts to ensure free media access to political news sources and protection from harassment has been discussed in the first report of this series published in January, and reproduced in the second report published in February.³ This was addressed in terms of the General and Legal environments. Since the status quo remained during the month under review, it is not considered necessary to reproduce this aspect.

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

The monitoring of daily events being the essence of this project, there is obviously new information in this respect to report. However, while the limitations set at the beginning of the exercise remain relevant and merit a reproduction hereunder, the variables upon which the monitoring exercise was based and analysed in the January, February and March 1999 reports have been set aside as earlier noted above. The focus now is on new issues upon which press attention has shifted owing to the conclusion of elections slated to take place during this transition programme. These are identified and defined hereunder.

(a) Limitations

The period to be covered by this project remains six months i.e. December 1998, to May 1999. The justification being that the period is expected to witness much political engineering as it covers the critical period of the political transition programme. However, this report is for the month of March 1999. This is the fourth month of the project time frame and the fourth report in the series.

(b) Variables

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

(1) Stories on Accusations of Electoral Fraud

Considered here are how the various print media monitored reported on and treated

3. *ibid*

allegations of electoral fraud by politicians and parties. The questions addressed include whether such allegations of electoral fraud were dismissed as the ranting of a bad loser or seen as a serious matter capable of undermining the credibility of the transition process and hence deserving proper scrutiny?

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

(2) Stories on Accountability in Governance

Considered here are how the various print media monitored and treated pronouncements on accountability in governance by politicians and political parties.

The questions addressed include whether the newspapers and magazines monitored reported such pronouncements with deserving seriousness or with doubt. Either because of the antecedents of the politicians or parties making such comments or as a result of a lingering doubt, due to the seeming hopelessness of Nigerians owing to the mind bogging allegations and proven cases of corruption in government? Also considered are publications by the press on ensuring accountability in governance.

(3) Stories on Loyal Opposition

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

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

(4) Stories on Post-Election Democratic Development

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

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

How is the press reporting and generating publications with respect to how the government is preparing for the success of the in-coming civilian administration? Both in terms of training of personnel that will work with the civilians and giving legal backing to the various stages of the transition process already concluded as well as the promulgation of the Constitution which is to be the guide rule for governance for the envisaged civilian democracy?

(5) Others

These consist of all other publications having political reference which, however, could not be grouped under the aforementioned variables.

(6) Total Number of Stories

This shall simply be all the above added together.

In addition to all the above, the total print space available to newspapers and magazines monitored during the period and the fraction devoted to a given variable and political issues in general shall be determined.

The newspapers monitored for this exercise were:

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

The following magazines were equally monitored:

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

5 ABOUT THE NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES MONITORED

A detailed background discussion of the newspapers and magazines monitored, in terms of their ownership structure, as well as ideological and philosophical persuasion, was given in our February report. The aim was to try and provide the reader a further insight into why a newspaper or magazine may have decided to report on the transition programme the way it did as we believe this could serve

as a link.⁴ It is, however, not considered necessary to reproduce the background discussion on the newspapers and magazines monitored here.

6. PRESENTATION OF RESULT FOR MARCH 1999

(a) NEWSPAPERS

(i) *Vanguard*

	Variables	No. of Stories	Pages
1.	Stories on Accusations of Electoral Fraud	83	23
2.	Stories on Accountability in Governance	5	1
3.	Stories on Loyal Opposition	13	2
4.	Stories on Post-Election Democratic Development	98	30
5.	Others	171	114
6.	Total Nos. of Pol. Stories/Pages	370	170

Formula:

No. of Pages Total space in sq. inches.
 1 page in inches sq. (141 sq. inches.)

Other relevant formation

Technical Details

Full page = 10.5 inches x 13.5 inches = 141 inches Sq.

Total number of pages published by *Vanguard* for the month of March 1999 were 1,040.

Total number of pages devoted to political stories and issues for the month of March 1999 were 170, i.e. - 16%

(ii) *Post Express*

	Variables	No. of Stories	Pages
1.	Stories on Accusations of Electoral Fraud	54	8
2.	Stories on Accountability in Governance	31	7
3.	Stories on Loyal Opposition	6	1
4.	Stories on Post-Election Democratic Development	163	31
5.	Others	231	69
6.	Total Nos. of Pol. Stories/Pages	485	116

Other relevant information

4. *Ibid*

Technical Details

Full page - 13.2 inches x 10.4 inches = 137 sq. inches.

The total number of pages published by *Post Express* for the month of March 1999, were 992

Total number of pages devoted to political stories and issues for the month of March 1999, were 116, i.e. 11.7%

(iii) National Concord

	Variables	No. of Stories	Pages
1.	Stories on Accusations of Electoral Fraud	87	24
2.	Stories on Accountability in Governance	5	0.3
3.	Stories on Loyal Opposition	6	1
4.	Stories on Post-Election Democratic Development	138	24
5.	Others	197	72
6.	Total Nos. of Pol. Stories/Pages	433	122

Other relevant information

Technical Details

Full - page 13.2 inches x 10 inches = 132 sq. inches.

The total number of pages published by *National Concord* for the month of March 1999, were 944.

Total number of pages devoted to political stories and issues for the month of March 1999 were, 122 i.e. 13%

(iv) The Punch

	Variables	No. of Stories	Pages
1.	Stories on Accusations of Electoral Fraud	122	39
2.	Stories on Accountability in Governance	5	2
3.	Stories on Loyal Opposition	7	1
4.	Stories on Post-Election Democratic Development	121	18
5.	Others	247	82
6.	Total Nos. of Pol. Stories/Pages	502	142

Other relevant information

Technical Details

Full - page 10.4 inches x 13.2 inches = 137sq. inches.

The total number of pages published by *The Punch* for the month of March 1999, were 952.

Total number of pages devoted to political stories and issues for the month of March 1999, were 142, i.e.15%

(v) *This Day*

	Variables	No. of Stories	Pages
1.	Stories on Accusations of Electoral Fraud	66	13
2.	Stories on Accountability in Governance	14	3
3.	Stories on Loyal Opposition	4	1
4.	Stories on Post-Election Democratic Development	158	31
5.	Others	217	49
6.	Total Nos. of Pol. Stories/Pages	459	97

Other relevant information

Technical Details

Full - page 10.5 inches x 14.3 inches = 151 sq. inches.

The total number of pages published by *This Day* for the month of March 1999, were 1,112

Total number of pages devoted to political stories and issues for the month of March 1999, were 97, i.e. 9%

(vi) *New Nigerian*

	Variables	No. of Stories	Pages
1.	Stories on Accusations of Electoral Fraud	33	13
2.	Stories on Accountability in Governance	2	1
3.	Stories on Loyal Opposition	13	3
4.	Stories on Post-Election Democratic Development	81	35
5.	Others	179	57
6.	Total Nos. of Pol. Stories/Pages	308	109

Other relevant information

Technical Details

Full - page 10.2 inches x 15.5 inches = 158 sq. inches.

The total number of pages published by *New Nigerian* for the month of March 1999, were 744.

Total number of pages devoted to political stories and issues for the month of March 1999, were 109, i.e. 15%

(vii) *The Guardian*

	Variables	No. of Stories	Pages
1.	Stories on Accusations of Electoral Fraud	71	17
2.	Stories on Accountability in Governance	19	5

3.	Stories on Loyal Opposition	17	3
4.	Stories on Post-Election Democratic Development	162	49
5.	Others	149	74
6.	Total Nos. of Pol. Stories/Pages	418	148

Other relevant information

Technical Details

Full - page 10 inches x 14.5 inches = 145 sq. inches.

The total number of pages published by *The Guardian* for the month of March 1999, were 1,584.

Total number of pages devoted to political stories and issues for the month of February 1999, were 148, i.e. 9%

(viii) The Diet

	Variables	No. of Stories	Pages
1.	Stories on Accusations of Electoral Fraud	34	14
2.	Stories on Accountability in Governance	13	6
3.	Stories on Loyal Opposition	10	1
4.	Stories on Post-Election Democratic Development	95	39
5.	Others	140	71
6.	Total Nos. of Pol. Stories/Pages	292	131

Other relevant information

Technical Details

Full - page 10.4 inches x 14.8 inches = 154 sq. inches.

The total number of pages published by *The Diet* for the month of March 1999, were 768.

Total number of pages devoted to political stories and issues for the month of March 1999, were 131, i.e. 17%

(ix) Daily Champion

	Variables	No. of Stories	Pages
1.	Stories on Accusations of Electoral Fraud	82	15
2.	Stories on Accountability in Governance	23	4
3.	Stories on Loyal Opposition	2	0.2
4.	Stories on Post-Election Democratic Development	132	22
5.	Others	180	48
6.	Total Nos. of Pol. Stories/Pages	419	89

Other relevant information*Technical Details*

Full - page 10.5 inches x 13.5 inches = 142 sq. inches.

The total number of pages published by *Daily Champion* for the month of March 1999, were 1,020.

Total number of pages devoted to political stories and issues for the month of March 1999, were 98, i.e. 9.6%

(x) Daily Times

	Variables	No. of Stories	Pages
1.	Stories on Accusations of Electoral Fraud	37	8
2.	Stories on Accountability in Governance	17	6
3.	Stories on Loyal Opposition	6	2
4.	Stories on Post-Election Democratic Development	149	22
5.	Others	159	72
6.	Total Nos. of Pol. Stories/Pages	368	110

Other relevant information*Technical Details*

Full - page 10 inches x 12 inches = 120 sq. inches.

The total number of pages published by *Daily Times* for the month of March 1999, were 720.

Total number of pages devoted to political stories and issues for the month of March 1999, were 110, i.e. 15%

(b) MAGAZINES**(i) Newswatch**

	Variables	No. of Stories	Pages
1.	Stories on Accusations of Electoral Fraud	2	7
2.	Stories on Accountability in Governance	4	12
3.	Stories on Loyal Opposition	1	5
4.	Stories on Post-Election Democratic Development	22	56
5.	Others	38	71
6.	Total Nos. of Pol. Stories/Pages	67	151

Other relevant information*Technical Details*

Full - page - 7.4 inches x 10 inches = 74 sq. inches.

The total number of pages published by *NewsWatch* for the month of March 1999, were 336.

Total number of pages devoted to political stories and issues for the month of March 1999, were 151, i.e. 64%

(ii) *The News*

	Variables	No. of Stories	Pages
1.	Stories on Accusations of Electoral Fraud	6	3
2.	Stories on Accountability in Governance	2	1
3.	Stories on Loyal Opposition	1	1
4.	Stories on Post-Election Democratic Development	23	36
5.	Others	44	71
6.	Total Nos. of Pol. Stories/Pages	76	112

Other relevant information

Technical Details

Full - page - 7.4 inches x 10 inches = 74 sq. inches.

The total number of pages published by *The News* for the month of March 1999, were 260.

Total number of pages devoted to political stories and issues for the month of March 1999, were 112, i.e. 43%

(iii) *TELL*

	Variables	No. of Stories	Pages
1.	Stories on Accusations of Electoral Fraud	3	3
2.	Stories on Accountability in Governance	1	0.05
3.	Stories on Loyal Opposition	1	2
4.	Stories on Post-Election Democratic Development	19	44
5.	Others	25	98
6.	Total Nos. of Pol. Stories/Pages	49	147

Other relevant information

Technical Details

Full - page - 7.4 inches x 10 inches = 74 sq. inches.

The total number of pages published by *TELL* for the month of March 1999, were 260.

Total number of pages devoted to political stories and issues for the month of March 1999, were 147, i.e. 57%

(iv) *The Source*

	Variables	No. of Stories	Pages
1.	Stories on Accusations of Electoral Fraud	1	8
2.	Stories on Accountability in Governance	0	0
3.	Stories on Loyal Opposition	0	0
4.	Stories on Post-Election Democratic Development	17	31
5.	Others	20	44
6.	Total Nos. of Pol. Stories/Pages	38	83

Other relevant information

Technical Details

Full - page - 7.4 inches x 10 inches = 74 sq. inches.

The total number of pages published by *The Source* for the month of March 1999, were 180.

Total number of pages devoted to political stories and issues for the month of March 1999, were 83, i.e. 46%

7 TABULAR REPRESENTATION OF DATA

TABLE SHOWING THE NUMBER OF PUBLICATIONS EACH MONITORED MAGAZINE FOCUSED ON EACH VARIABLE							
Newswatch	2	4	1	22	38	67	151
The News	6	2	1	23	44	76	112
TELL	5	2	0	17	35	59	87
The Source	1	0	0	17	20	38	83
TABLE SHOWING THE NUMBER OF PUBLICATIONS EACH MONITORED NEWSPAPERS FOCUSED ON EACH VARIABLE							
The Punch	122	5	7	121	247	502	142
Daily Times	37	17	6	149	159	368	110
New Nigerian	33	2	13	81	197	308	109
National Concord	87	5	6	138	197	433	122
Daily Champion	82	23	2	132	180	419	89
The Guardian	71	19	17	162	149	418	148
The Diet	34	13	10	95	140	292	131
This Day	66	14	4	158	217	459	97
Vanguard	83	5	13	98	171	370	170
Post Express	54	31	6	163	231	485	116
VARIABLES	ELECTORAL FRAUD	ACCOUNTABILITY IN GOVERNANCE	LOYAL OPPOSITION	POST ELECTION DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT	OTHERS	TOTAL NOS STORIES	TOTAL NOS PAGES

8 INTERPRETATION

(a) NEWSPAPERS

(i) *Vanguard*

During the month under review, *Vanguard* published a total of 1040 pages. Of these, 170 pages were devoted to political issues. This was made up of 370 publications.

Stories/publications relating to Accusations of Electoral Fraud were 83, spread across 23 pages; Accountability in Governance, five, in one page; reports on Loyal Opposition, 13, in two pages; while those relating to Post-election Democratic Development were 98, in 30 pages.

Other political stories which, however, could not be grouped under any of the above-considered variables, were 171, all in a total of 114 pages.

(ii) *Post Express*

During the month under review, *Post Express* published a total of 992 pages. Of these, 116 pages were devoted to political issues. This was made up of 485 publications.

Stories/publications relating to Accusations of Electoral Fraud were 54, spread across eight pages; Accountability in Governance, 31, in seven pages; reports on Loyal Opposition, six, in one page; while those relating to Post-election Democratic Development were 163, in 31 pages.

Other political stories which, however, could not be grouped under any of the above-considered variables, were 231, all in a total of 69 pages.

(iii) *National Concord*

During the month under review, *National Concord* published a total of 944 pages. Of these, 122 pages were devoted to political issues. This was made up of 433 publications.

Stories/publications relating to Accusations of Electoral Fraud were 87, spread across 24 pages; Accountability in Governance, five, in less than one-third of a page; reports on Loyal Opposition, six, in one page; while those relating to Post-election Democratic Development were 139, in 24 pages.

Other political stories which, however, could not be grouped under any of the above-considered variables, were 197, all in a total of 72 pages.

(iv) *The Punch*

During the month under review, *The Punch* published a total of 952 pages. Of these, 142 pages were devoted to political issues. This was made up of 502 publications.

Stories/publications relating to Accusations of Electoral Fraud were 122, spread across 39 pages; Accountability in Governance, five, in two pages; reports on Loyal Opposition, seven, in one page; while those relating to Post-election Democratic Development were 121, in 18 pages.

Other political stories which, however, could not be grouped under any of the above-considered variables, were 247, all in a total of 82 pages.

(v) *This Day*

During the month under review, *This Day* published a total of 1,112 pages. Of these, 97 pages were devoted to political issues. This was made up of 459 publications.

Stories/publications relating to Accusations of Electoral Fraud were 66, spread across 13 pages; Accountability in Governance, 14, in three pages; reports on Loyal Opposition, four, in one page; while those relating to Post-election Democratic Development were 158, in 31 pages.

Other political stories which, however, could not be grouped under any of the above-considered variables, were 217, all in a total of 49 pages.

(vi) *New Nigerian*

During the month under review, *New Nigerian* published a total of 744 pages. Of these, 109 pages were devoted to political issues. This was made up of 308 publications.

Stories/publications relating to Accusations of Electoral Fraud were 33, spread across 13 pages; Accountability in Governance, two, in one page; reports on Loyal Opposition, 13, in three pages; while those relating to Post-election Democratic Development were 81, in 35 pages.

Other political stories which, however, could not be grouped under any of the above-considered variables, were 179, all in a total of 57 pages.

(vii) *The Guardian*

During the month under review, *The Guardian* published a total of 1,584 pages. Of these, 148 pages were devoted to political issues. This was made up of 418 publications.

Stories/publications relating to Accusations of Electoral Fraud were 71, spread across 17 pages; Accountability in Governance, 19, in five pages; reports on Loyal Opposition, 17, in three pages; while those relating to Post-election Democratic Development were 162, in 49 pages.

Other political stories which, however, could not be grouped under any of the above-considered variables, were 149, all in a total of 74 pages.

(viii) *The Diet*

During the month under review, *The Diet* published a total of 768 pages. Of these, 131 pages were devoted to political issues. This was made up of 292 publications.

Stories/publications relating to Accusations of Electoral Fraud were 34, spread across 14 pages; Accountability in Governance, 13, in six pages; reports on Loyal Opposition, 10, in one page; while those relating to Post-election Democratic Development were 95, in 39 pages.

Other political stories which, however, could not be grouped under any of the above-considered variables, were 140, all in a total of 71 pages.

(ix) *Daily Champion*

During the month under review, *Daily Champion* published a total of 1,020 pages. Of these, 98 pages were devoted to political issues. This was made up of 419 publications.

Stories/publications relating to Accusations of Electoral Fraud were 82, spread across 15 pages; Accountability in Governance, 23, in four pages; reports on Loyal Opposition, two, in one-fifth of a page; while those relating to Post-election Democratic Development were 132, in 22 pages.

Other political stories which, however, could not be grouped under any of the above-considered variables, were 180, all in a total of 48 pages.

(x) *Daily Times*

During the month under review, *Daily Times* published a total of 720 pages. Of these, 110 pages were devoted to political issues. This was made up of 368 publications.

Stories/publications relating to Accusations of Electoral Fraud were 37, spread across eight pages; Accountability in Governance, 17, in six pages; reports on Loyal Opposition, six, in two pages; while those relating to Post-election Democratic Development were 149 in 22 pages.

Other political stories which, however, could not be grouped under any of the above-considered variables, were 159, all in a total of 72 pages.

(b) MAGAZINES

(i) *Newswatch*

During the month under review, *Newswatch* published a total of 236 pages. Of these, 151 pages were devoted to political issues. This was made up of 67 publications.

Stories/publications relating to Accusations of Electoral Fraud were two, spread across seven pages; Accountability in Governance, four, in 12 pages; reports on Loyal Opposition, was one, in five pages; while those relating to Post-election Democratic Development were 22, in 56 pages.

Other political stories which, however, could not be grouped under any of the above-considered variables, were 38, all in a total of 71 pages.

(ii) *The News*

During the month under review, *The News* published a total of 260 pages. Of these, 112 pages were devoted to political issues. This was made up of 76 publications.

Stories/publications relating to Accusations of Electoral Fraud were six, spread across three pages; Accountability in Governance, two, in one page; reports on Loyal Opposition, one, in one page; while those relating to Post-election Democratic Development were 23, in 36 pages.

Other political stories which, however, could not be grouped under any of the above-considered variables, were 44, all in a total of 71 pages.

(iii) *TELL*

During the month under review, *TELL* published a total of 260 pages. Of these, 147 pages were devoted to political issues. This was made up of 49 publications.

Stories/publications relating to Accusations of Electoral Fraud were three, spread across three pages; Accountability in Governance, one, in less than one-tenth of a page; reports on Loyal Opposition, one, in two pages; while those relating to Post-election Democratic Development were 19, in 44 pages.

Other political stories which, however, could not be grouped under any of the above-considered variables, were 25, all in a total of 98 pages.

(iv) *The Source*

During the month under review, *The Source* published a total of 180 pages. Of these, 83 pages were devoted to political issues. This was made up of 38 publications.

Stories/publications relating to Accusations of Electoral Fraud was one, spread across eight pages; Accountability in Governance and reports on Loyal Opposition were nil; while those relating to Post-election Democratic Development were 17 in 31 pages.

Other political stories which, however, could not be grouped under any of the above-considered variables, were 20, all in a total of 44 pages.

7 ANALYSIS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

(i) Analysis

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

First, in relation to how the government acts to ensure that the news media gather and impart information and ideas, it is noted that there continued to pervade during the month review a general air of press freedom which characterised the months before. This is considered in relation to the absence of any physical attempt by the government to stop the press from performing its function.

But four very important things, which were noted in the March 1999 report, are worth repeating here. First, the government has not deemed it fit to give specific legal protection to journalists in the general performance of their professional duties or with regard to the coverage of the political transition programme. There remains a lack of legal or institutional framework by which journalists or other members of the public can have access to information as of right about the political process.

In the March 1999 report, we concluded that the lack of legal protection for journalist could be said to have hindered the press during the previous months from inquiring into the issue of the sources of campaign funding for political parties and candidates. This is in spite of the widespread public concern about the huge sums of money which political candidates routinely spent in public. We conclude here again that this also restricted the press during the month under review from investigating into

allegations of electoral fraud over which tension greatly heightened during the early weeks of March 1999.

Conversely, the existence of several restrictive press laws has served as a limiting factor for numerous journalists against publishing information, which were not confirmed by official sources.

Secondly, the fact that various legislation, decrees and edicts which restrict press freedom still exist, constitute a negation of the expressed hand of fellowship extended to mass media practitioners by the head of state.

Although none of these repressive press laws were known to have been put to use by the government during the month under review, the fact of their existence resulted for many journalists in a situation where they had to consciously censor themselves.

Thirdly, the Minister of Information Chief John Nwodo Jnr., announced in December last year that the government was working at making libel a criminal offence. This is no doubt a call to further self-censorship. Although it has yet to be implemented, journalists are bound to be overly wary of what they publish henceforth. This is so because experience has shown that apart from the decree when passed taking retroactive effect as has been the case in the past with most other press freedom decrees, politicians who wish to divert press attention from themselves, will have a field day charging journalists and publishers with criminal libel.

Fourthly, the imposition of Value Added Tax (VAT) on newspapers and magazines effected through the 1999 budget, is capable of incapacitating the operations of media houses.

The operation of government-owned and controlled newspapers remained a major source of concern. The existence of government-subsidized newspapers violates the principle of Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Although governments are clearly entitled to publicise information about health, access to government services, legislation pending or enacted, or court decisions, it is inappropriate to use public funds to publicise the statements and opinions of government departments, ministers or officials. These already have extensive access to the media by virtue of their positions in public eye.

The access of government owned newspapers to government subsidies derived from public funds undermines the competitive nature of the media industry. A retention of this practice and its carry-over to the coming democratic dispensation will place the ruling party at an unfair advantage. This is so because it would be in a position to use public funds to promote the party as well as its members, officials and activities to the detriment of the other parties or opposition politicians and other dissenting voices in the country.

The practice ought to be abolished now.

On the part of the press, as it relates to how it reports activities around our four main variables, or generate publications in these respects, our observations are set out below.

First, it should be noted that generally, the data indicates a fall in the devotion of print spaces to

political issues by all the newspapers monitored some by as much as 67 per cent. For example, newspapers such as *This Day*, *The Punch* and *National Concord* reduced in their print-space allocation to political issues by as much as 67, 45 and 50 per cent, respectively. Specifically, *This Day* which devoted as much as 276 pages to political issues in the month of February 1999 devoted 97 pages to political issues during the month under review.

The Punch on its part, during the month under review, devoted 142 pages to political issues as against a total of 232 pages during the month of February 1999. The same goes for *National Concord*, which in February 1999 devoted 206 pages to political issues as against 122 pages during the month under review. The only exception is *The Diet* newspaper which had its allocation of print-space to political issues raised from 97 pages in February 1999, to 131 pages during the month under review.

However, the data indicates a general inverse relationship to the trend noticed in the case of the newspapers with respect to the magazines monitored. The data shows a marked increase in the space allocation to political issues by all the magazines monitored during the month under review. For example *The Source* showed over 100 per cent increase in the number of pages allocated to political issues during the month of March 1999. It recorded 83 pages allocated to political issues up from its February 1999 allocation of 26 pages. The same goes for *Newswatch*, *The News* and *TELL*.

From its 65 pages allocated to political issues in February 1999, *Newswatch* allocated a total of 151 pages to political issues during the month of March 1999 under review. *The News* on its part allocated 112 pages to political issues during period of February and March 1999, up from 26 pages in the previous month.

TELL allocated 87 pages to political issues in March as against 29 pages in February.

Meanwhile, for a proper and easier appreciation of the analyses relating to how the press reports activities around our variables and comments on those reports with respect to fair and objective reporting, we have set these out one after the other hereunder:

a. How the Media Reports on Allegations of Electoral Fraud and Generate Investigative Reports Thereof

The data indicates that out of our four main variables, there were substantial reports on allegations of electoral fraud during the month under review. In the newspaper categories, *The Punch* led with 122 mentions while *National Concord* followed with 87 mentions. Coming at the rear was the *Daily Times*, *The Diet* and *New Nigerian* with 37, 34 and 33 mentions, respectively.

The magazines recorded five mentions by *The News* and *TELL* each and one mention by *Newswatch* and *The Source* each. There was sadly no publication in any of either the newspapers or magazines monitored which was generated from an independent painstaking investigation to authenticate or verify the allegations of electoral fraud. Rather, all the publications were reports of pronouncements

comments or claims by politicians or reports of court proceedings following the petition by the APP / AD alliance presidential candidate, Chief Olu Falae, and another by a concerned politician, Chief Chuba Egolum, at the Presidential Elections Tribunal on March 15, challenging INEC's declaration of General Obasanjo as the winner of the presidential elections held on February 27, 1999.

However, the position of some of the newspapers in terms of what they thought of the allegation could be gleaned from the various editorials. While some newspapers maintained a neutral and a wait-and-see attitude regards the allegation of electoral fraud by Chief Falae, others subtly passed it off as immaterial.

The Punch, for example, could be said to epitomise the group of newspapers which adopted a neutral attitude on this issue. In an editorial on March 25 1999, titled: "As Falae's Petition is Heard" the paper called on all parties to ensure that justice is not only done, but seen to have been done. It advised all concerned to be watchful of what they say so as not to inflame passion. It noted that notwithstanding the controversy that surrounded Chief Falae's decision to go to court, it is his right which cannot be taken away from him and wished the nation comes out stronger.

But on the hand, most of the newspapers took the position of dismissing the charge of electoral fraud by Chief Falae. Some on the premise that the said fraud was perpetuated by both parties, APP/ AD alliance and PDP, or because it could serve as a facade for the military to stay put in power.

Among these are the *National Concord*, *Daily Champion* and *The Guardian*.

The first in such comments was published by *The Guardian* in an editorial on March 4, 1999, titled: "The Presidential Elections". The newspaper while acknowledging irregularities in the election, however, congratulated the pair of General Obasanjo and his running mate, Alhaji Abubakar Atiku.

It noted that the malpractices recorded at the election were not such as to vitiate the integrity of the presidential elections. To it, the election has been won and lost.

It considered as curious that Chief Falae is relying on the reported irregularities to reject the result. Apparently referring to calls by some Nigerians for Chief Falae to accept the result and not go to court, the newspaper said it hoped that "the wise counsel which has been urged by well-meaning Nigerians who have interceded will prevail."

The Guardian's position was supported by *Daily Champion* in an editorial on March 5, 1999. Captioned: "Post-election Protest" the paper while acknowledging the veracity of election monitors' reported irregularities during the presidential election, insisted that "no matter the alleged rigging in some constituencies, however, the essential outcome of the presidential election remains a victory for the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)."

It attempted to explained away the reasons for the "loss" by Chief Falae which it hinged on the misunderstanding arising from the APP/ AD alliance. But it went further to say that: "Even if these variables were not to be considered, the weighty fact that the nation has experienced too much of

political rancour and bad blood must deter any rejection of the outcome of the election.”

The newspaper followed-up with another front-page editorial comment on March 8, 1999. In the editorial titled: “Obasanjo’s Victory”, it celebrated the “victory” and “congratulate the General Obasanjo on his hard won victory.”

The same angle was pursued by *National Concord*. In an editorial on March 4, 1999, captioned: “Presidential Elections: Matters Arising” the paper took an overview of the result of the presidential election and the declaration by INEC of General Obasanjo of the PDP as the winner. But it said: “Regrettably the joy of imminent civil democratic rule is dampened following the rejection of General Obasanjo’s victory by the APP/AD alliance on grounds of massive electoral malpractices”.

The paper acknowledged the charge by election monitors of several instances of inflated voters’ returns at polling centres, particularly in the South-South and Northern States among other irregularities which it said reports indicated were attributable to both parties and condemned electoral malpractices. It, however, considered as unnecessary the threat by APP / AD alliance to embark on a non-violent protest to cause an annulment of the result. The reason being that not only were both parties fingered in the malpractices, “our history has showed that non-violent protest almost always degenerate into violence” and which could threaten the proposed May 29 hand-over date and political crises may unwittingly give the military the excuse to stay in power. It advised that the election petition tribunal or court of law should be the final arbiter.

b. Reports on Accountability in Governance

The data also shows a rather low focus on this variable by the newspapers monitored. But in the main time, *Post Express* had the most publications on loyal opposition with 31 mentions, followed by *Daily Champion* with 23 mentions. At the rear is *New Nigerian* with 2 mentions, *Vanguard*, *National Concord* and *The Punch* having five mentions each.

In the magazine category, *Newswatch* led with four mentions while *The News* and *TELL* had two mentions each.

This trend seem to be easily explained by the fact that discussion of accountability in governance is only for now an abstract concept since the civilian are yet to assume office.

c. Reports on Loyal Opposition

The data shows that reports on this variable by the various newspapers monitored is on the low side. The same goes for the magazines. This is, perhaps, understandable since civilians have yet to assume political governance when opposition parties and politicians are expected to be more forth coming with criticisms of policies and actions of the government in power.

However, *The Guardian* led here with 17 mentions followed by *Vanguard* and *New Nigerian* with 13 mentions each. At the bottom in this regard is *Daily Champion* with two mentions.

For the magazines, only *Newswatch* and *The News* had one mention each.

d. Reports on Post-Election Democratic Development

The data shows that out of our four main variables, this is the most focused by both the newspapers and magazines monitored.

Post Express led here with 163 mentions closely followed by *The Guardian* with 162 mentions. *This Day* stands at the third position with 158 mentions.

Coming at the rear is *New Nigerian* with 81 mentions.

It is predicted that in subsequent months when arrangement would be in top gear for the hand-over to civilians, activities aimed at strengthening civil democratic institutions would become top priority and hence more focus on this variable would be recorded.

e. Reports on Other Stake-Holder Groups

Not surprisingly, the data shows that the press accorded the highest focus on this variable. *The Punch* led here with 247 mentions, followed by *Post Express* with 231. Coming at the rear is *The Diet* with 140 mentions.

f. Fair and Objective Reporting

It is noted that most of the reports during the month under review are considered fair and objective. However, there were some instances, though few, when we considered certain reports as unfair and lacking in objectivity.

For example, arising from the charge of electoral fraud by Chief Falae, presidential candidate of APP/AD alliance, not a few Nigerians expressed the opinion that he should not go to court while others urged him on. We concede these comments as the fundamental rights of those making them and publications of such views by newspapers only fair. We consider however, an editorial comment by a newspaper as being a different matter entirely.

It is for this reason that we consider some of the editorials referred to above sufficient cases in point and hence worthy of analysis. For example, the right to disagree is a cardinal principle of democratic culture. Secondly, where disputations arise over an election result or its conduct, until such is resolved through constitutional and legal instrumentalities such as exercise cannot be deemed to have been concluded.

Our considered view, therefore, is that no matter the political rancour we have experienced as a nation and the anxiety of Nigerians towards achieving civil democratic rule, to castigate a man for seeking to vindicate his political rights through legal means, is a call for a deformed democratic culture.

It is in this light, that we consider *The Guardian*, *Daily Champion* and *National Concord* position on the challenge of Obasanjo's declaration as president-elect by Chief Falae, unfair and lacking in objectivity.

Perhaps, we may pose the question: Had the Election Petition Tribunal upturned the verdict of

INEC, what position would *The Guardian*, *Daily Champion* and *National Concord* have taken? Refuse to recognise same or retrace its celebrations?

Further, reference is made to *The Diet* which in its issue of March 6, 1999, published in its front page an article titled: “Ahead Forth Republic : Obasanjo’s Cabinet Emerges.”

The story was essentially a speculation on who and who may make Obasanjo’s cabinet. But published along side was a list of persons whom according to the newspaper, made the ministerial and ambassadorial appointments of General Obasanjo.

However, General Obasanjo was to distance himself from that publication as untrue and baseless. In our consideration, such publication does not augur well for the development of an enduring democratic culture. It has the tendency to generate ill feelings among the persons concerned if for example such appointment are not eventually made. On the other hand for people who may have felt that they merit such appointments but get the impression through such publication that they are not being considered in that wise, could, therefore, begin to nurse a different agenda which may not be healthy to the political evolution process.

(ii) Conclusion

We affirmed that there was in the main, fair coverage of the political programme during the month of March 1999 by the newspapers and magazines monitored.

There were, however, few instances when we considered editorial positions of some newspapers less than neutral and unhelpful to the development of democratic culture in Nigeria. Cases in point are the positions of *The Guardian*, *Daily Champion* and *National Concord* in their editorials referred to above, and as well *The Diet* publication also referred to above.

Error Margin

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

(iii) Recommendations

- ◆ The Government should create a 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 rethink its VAT on newspapers and magazines policy and drop its reported plans to make libel a criminal offence.

As we noted earlier, it was impossible for the media to investigate cases of allegations of electoral fraud. It is not unlikely that such inability by the press to probe such allegations was as a result of fear of prosecution by parties and politicians involved in those reported malpractices.

- ◆ 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.
- ◆ The print media should improve significantly on their focus on Civic Education publications.
- ◆ The position by some newspapers that illegalities be condoned on the alter of expediency is unhealthy for a sound democratic development. The press is expected to be neutral in their report on the political transition process because of the role of the mass media in helping to ensure the enthronement and sustenance of democracy.
- ◆ It is hereby recommended that henceforth, the press should divorce itself of the temptation to take such step as dismissing “unpopular” views and positions for the mere fact of their being so.
- ◆ It is hereby recommended that the press should henceforth focus on investigative reporting and setting an agenda with regards to:
 - issues bothering on transparency in governance
 - issues on loyal opposition ; and
 - issues on post-election democratic development.



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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