

Media Scorecard

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



May 1999

**...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 fifth 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 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, March and April 1999 reports, Media Rights Agenda has in this report, carried out its monitoring exercise on 10 national newspapers and four news feature magazines.

The variables which formed the basis of the analysis in the April 1999 report, have been retained in this report.

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 fifth 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 April 1 and April 30, 1999.

The report focuses on the coverage of the political programme by 10 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*, *National 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, Media Rights Agenda 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 have access to full accurate and up-to-date information about about representatives, candidates and colleagues about community issues. The rights to assemble and associate freely are also protected by these 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 a country like Nigeria which does 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 Media Rights Agenda established in those reports 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 under this project, the objectives of this monitoring remain:

1) To monitor the coverage by the print media of political and human rights issues during 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 under this project. They 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, the limitations set at the beginning of the exercise remain relevant and merit a reproduction hereunder. Similarly, the variables upon which the monitoring exercise were based in the April 1999 report remain valid. They are also reproduced 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 cover activities during the month of April 1999. This is the fifth month of the project and the fifth report in the series.

(b) Variables

The variables and issues that will form the focus of 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 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 serious issues capable of undermining the credibility of the transition process and hence deserving proper scrutiny, or whether such allegations of electoral

3. *ibid*

fraud, though seen as having serious implications on the political transition programme, were down-played because they are also capable of providing an 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 how well checks and balances are provided by various bodies and institutions including 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 issues 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 govern 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 the February 1999 report. The aim was to provide the reader with some insight into why a newspaper or magazine may have decided to report on the transition programme the way it did⁴ It is, however, not considered necessary to reproduce the background discussion on the newspapers and magazines monitored here.

4. *Ibid*

6. PRESENTATION OF RESULT FOR APRIL 1999

(a) NEWSPAPERS

(i) *Vanguard*

	Variables	No. of Stories	Pages
1.	Stories on Accusations of Electoral Fraud	37	14
2.	Stories on Accountability in Governance	3	1.2
3.	Stories on Loyal Opposition	6	4.2
4.	Stories on Post-Election Democratic Development	101	28
5.	Others	150	60
6.	Total Nos. of Pol. Stories/Pages	297	108

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 April 1999 were 1,056.

Total number of pages devoted to political stories and issues for the month of April 1999 were 108, i.e. 10.2 %

(ii) *Post Express*

	Variables	No. of Stories	Pages
1.	Stories on Accusations of Electoral Fraud	7	2
2.	Stories on Accountability in Governance	32	7
3.	Stories on Loyal Opposition	3	1
4.	Stories on Post-Election Democratic Development	149	27
5.	Others	301	46
6.	Total Nos. of Pol. Stories/Pages	492	83

Other relevant information

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 April 1999, were 960

Total number of pages devoted to political stories and issues for the month of April 1999, were 83, i.e. 9 %

(iii) National Concord

	Variables	No. of Stories	Pages
1.	Stories on Accusations of Electoral Fraud	7	1
2.	Stories on Accountability in Governance	16	2.2
3.	Stories on Loyal Opposition	5	2
4.	Stories on Post-Election Democratic Development	64	12
5.	Others	168	31
6.	Total Nos. of Pol. Stories/Pages	259	48

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 April 1999, were 912.

Total number of pages devoted to political stories and issues for the month of April 1999 were, 48 i.e. 5.3 %

(iv) The Punch

	Variables	No. of Stories	Pages
1.	Stories on Accusations of Electoral Fraud	38	16
2.	Stories on Accountability in Governance	9	1.2
3.	Stories on Loyal Opposition	25	3.4
4.	Stories on Post-Election Democratic Development	163	48
5.	Others	169	56
6.	Total Nos. of Pol. Stories/Pages	404	124

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 April 1999, were 1152.

Total number of pages devoted to political stories and issues for the month of April 1999, were 124, i.e. 10.8 %

(v) This Day

	Variables	No. of Stories	Pages
1.	Stories on Accusations of Electoral Fraud	42	14
2.	Stories on Accountability in Governance	7	2

3.	Stories on Loyal Opposition	14	3
4.	Stories on Post-Election Democratic Development	90	21
5.	Others	200	96
6.	Total Nos. of Pol. Stories/Pages	353	136

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 April 1999, were 1,120

Total number of pages devoted to political stories and issues for the month of April 1999, were 136, i.e. 12 %

(vi) New Nigerian

	Variables	No. of Stories	Pages
1.	Stories on Accusations of Electoral Fraud	17	4
2.	Stories on Accountability in Governance	13	3
3.	Stories on Loyal Opposition	14	3
4.	Stories on Post-Election Democratic Development	78	20
5.	Others	108	35
6.	Total Nos. of Pol. Stories/Pages	230	65

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 April 1999, were 720.

Total number of pages devoted to political stories and issues for the month of April 1999, were 65, i.e. 9 %

(vii) The Guardian

	Variables	No. of Stories	Pages
1.	Stories on Accusations of Electoral Fraud	44	14
2.	Stories on Accountability in Governance	2	0.1
3.	Stories on Loyal Opposition	14	4
4.	Stories on Post-Election Democratic Development	114	29
5.	Others	113	44
6.	Total Nos. of Pol. Stories/Pages	287	92

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 April 1999, were 1,728.

Total number of pages devoted to political stories and issues for the month of April 1999, were 92, i.e. 5.3 %

(viii) *The Diet*

	Variables	No. of Stories	Pages
1.	Stories on Accusations of Electoral Fraud	3	1
2.	Stories on Accountability in Governance	0	0
3.	Stories on Loyal Opposition	5	1
4.	Stories on Post-Election Democratic Development	64	17
5.	Others	77	36
6.	Total Nos. of Pol. Stories/Pages	114	55

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 April 1999, were 408.

Total number of pages devoted to political stories and issues for the month of April 1999, were 55, i.e. 13.5 %

(ix) *Daily Champion*

	Variables	No. of Stories	Pages
1.	Stories on Accusations of Electoral Fraud	16	6
2.	Stories on Accountability in Governance	4	1
3.	Stories on Loyal Opposition	10	32
4.	Stories on Post-Election Democratic Development	15	32
5.	Others	95	24
6.	Total Nos. of Pol. Stories/Pages	140	65

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 April 1999, were

1,040.

Total number of pages devoted to political stories and issues for the month of April 1999, were 65, i.e. 6.3 %

(x) Daily Times

	Variables	No. of Stories	Pages
1.	Stories on Accusations of Electoral Fraud	15	5
2.	Stories on Accountability in Governance	20	5
3.	Stories on Loyal Opposition	6	3
4.	Stories on Post-Election Democratic Development	63	12
5.	Others	180	26
6.	Total Nos. of Pol. Stories/Pages	284	51

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 April 1999, were 728.

Total number of pages devoted to political stories and issues for the month of April 1999, were 51, i.e. 7 %

(b) MAGAZINES

(i) Newswatch

	Variables	No. of Stories	Pages
1.	Stories on Accusations of Electoral Fraud	3	5
2.	Stories on Accountability in Governance	0	0
3.	Stories on Loyal Opposition	0	0
4.	Stories on Post-Election Democratic Development	3	10
5.	Others	20	21
6.	Total Nos. of Pol. Stories/Pages	26	36

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 April 1999, were 212.

Total number of pages devoted to political stories and issues for the month of April 1999, were 36, i.e. 17 %

(ii) *The News*

	Variables	No. of Stories	Pages
1.	Stories on Accusations of Electoral Fraud	4	4
2.	Stories on Accountability in Governance	4	1
3.	Stories on Loyal Opposition	2	2
4.	Stories on Post-Election Democratic Development	10	11
5.	Others	45	23
6.	Total Nos. of Pol. Stories/Pages	65	41

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 April 1999, were 208.

Total number of pages devoted to political stories and issues for the month of April 1999, were 41, i.e. 20 %

(iii) *TELL*

	Variables	No. of Stories	Pages
1.	Stories on Accusations of Electoral Fraud	4	2
2.	Stories on Accountability in Governance	0	0
3.	Stories on Loyal Opposition	2	2
4.	Stories on Post-Election Democratic Development	3	12
5.	Others	67	27
6.	Total Nos. of Pol. Stories/Pages	76	43

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 April 1999, were 208.

Total number of pages devoted to political stories and issues for the month of April 1999, were 43, i.e. 20.7 %

(iv) *The Source*

	Variables	No. of Stories	Pages
1.	Stories on Accusations of Electoral Fraud	3	6
2.	Stories on Accountability in Governance	0	0
3.	Stories on Loyal Opposition	1	2

4.	Stories on Post-Election Democratic Development	0	0
5.	Others	13	18
6.	Total Nos. of Pol. Stories/Pages	17	26

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 April 1999, were 144.

Total number of pages devoted to political stories and issues for the month of April 1999, were 26, i.e. 18 %

7 TABULAR REPRESENTATION OF DATA

TABLE SHOWING THE NUMBER OF PUBLICATIONS EACH MONITORED MAGAZINE FOCUSED ON EACH VARIABLE							
Newswatch	3	0	0	3	20	26	36
The News	4	4	2	10	45	65	41
TELL	4	0	2	3	67	76	43
The Source	3	0	1	0	13	17	26

TABLE SHOWING THE NUMBER OF PUBLICATIONS EACH MONITORED NEWSPAPERS FOCUSED ON EACH VARIABLE							
The Punch	38	9	25	163	169	404	124
Daily Times	15	20	6	63	180	284	51
New Nigerian	17	13	14	78	108	230	65
National Concord	7	16	5	64	168	259	48
Daily Champion	16	4	10	15	95	140	65
The Guardian	44	2	14	114	113	287	92
The Diet	3	0	5	64	72	144	55
This Day	42	7	14	90	200	353	136
Vanguard	37	3	6	101	150	297	108
Post Express	7	32	3	149	301	492	83
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 ,1056 pages. Of these, 108 pages were devoted to political issues. This was made up of 297 publications.

Stories/publications relating to Accusations of Electoral Fraud were 37, spread across 14 pages; Accountability in Governance, three, in one and one fifth of a page; reports on Loyal Opposition, six, in four pages and one-fifth of a page; while those relating to Post-election Democratic Development were 101, in 28 pages.

Other political stories which, however, could not be grouped under any of the above-considered variables, were 150, all in a total of 60 pages.

(ii) *Post Express*

During the month under review, *Post Express* published a total of 960 pages. Of these, 83 pages were devoted to political issues. This was made up of 492 publications.

Stories/publications relating to Accusations of Electoral Fraud were seven , spread across two pages; Accountability in Governance, 32, in seven pages; reports on Loyal Opposition, three, in one page; while those relating to Post-election Democratic Development were 149, in 27 pages.

Other political stories which, however, could not be grouped under any of the above-considered variables, were 301, all in a total of 46 pages.

(iii) *National Concord*

During the month under review, *National Concord* published a total of 912 pages. Of these, 48 pages were devoted to political issues. This was made up of 259 publications.

Stories/publications relating to Accusations of Electoral Fraud were seven, spread across one page; Accountability in Governance, 16, in less than two and one-fifth of a page; reports on Loyal Opposition, five, in two pages; while those relating to Post-election Democratic Development were 64, in 12 pages.

Other political stories which, however, could not be grouped under any of the above-considered variables, were 168, all in a total of 31 pages.

(iv) *The Punch*

During the month under review, *The Punch* published a total of 1,152 pages. Of these, 124 pages were devoted to political issues. This was made up of 404 publications.

Stories/publications relating to Accusations of Electoral Fraud were 38, spread across 16 pages;

Accountability in Governance, nine, in one and one-fifth of a page; reports on Loyal Opposition, 25, in three and two-fifth of a page; while those relating to Post-election Democratic Development were 163, in 48 pages.

Other political stories which, however, could not be grouped under any of the above-considered variables, were 169, all in a total of 56 pages.

(v) *This Day*

During the month under review, *This Day* published a total of 1,120 pages. Of these, 136 pages were devoted to political issues. This was made up of 353 publications.

Stories/publications relating to Accusations of Electoral Fraud were 42, spread across 14 pages; Accountability in Governance, seven, in two pages; reports on Loyal Opposition, 14, in three pages; while those relating to Post-election Democratic Development were 90, in 21 pages.

Other political stories which, however, could not be grouped under any of the above-considered variables, were 200, all in a total of 96 pages.

(vi) *New Nigerian*

During the month under review, *New Nigerian* published a total of 720 pages. Of these, 65 pages were devoted to political issues. This was made up of 230 publications.

Stories/publications relating to Accusations of Electoral Fraud were 17, spread across four pages; Accountability in Governance, 13, in three pages; reports on Loyal Opposition, 14, in three pages; while those relating to Post-election Democratic Development were 78, in 20 pages.

Other political stories which, however, could not be grouped under any of the above-considered variables, were 108, all in a total of 35 pages.

(vii) *The Guardian*

During the month under review, *The Guardian* published a total of 1,728 pages. Of these, 92 pages were devoted to political issues. This was made up of 287 publications.

Stories/publications relating to Accusations of Electoral Fraud were 44, spread across 14 pages; Accountability in Governance, two, in one-tenth of a page; reports on Loyal Opposition, 14, in four pages; while those relating to Post-election Democratic Development were 114, in 29 pages.

Other political stories which, however, could not be grouped under any of the above-considered variables, were 113, all in a total of 44 pages.

(viii) *The Diet*

During the month under review, *The Diet* published a total of 408 pages. Of these, 55 pages were devoted to political issues. This was made up of 144 publications.

Stories/publications relating to Accusations of Electoral Fraud were three, spread across one tenth of a page; Accountability in Governance, nil; reports on Loyal Opposition, five, in one page;

while those relating to Post-election Democratic Development were 64, in 17 pages.

Other political stories which, however, could not be grouped under any of the above-considered variables, were 72, all in a total of 36 pages.

(ix) *Daily Champion*

During the month under review, *Daily Champion* published a total of 1,040 pages. Of these, 65 pages were devoted to political issues. This was made up of 140 publications.

Stories/publications relating to Accusations of Electoral Fraud were 16, spread across six pages; Accountability in Governance, four, in one page; reports on Loyal Opposition, 10, in two pages; while those relating to Post-election Democratic Development were 15, in 32 pages.

Other political stories which, however, could not be grouped under any of the above-considered variables, were 95, all in a total of 24 pages.

(x) *Daily Times*

During the month under review, *Daily Times* published a total of 728 pages. Of these, 50 pages were devoted to political issues. This was made up of 284 publications.

Stories/publications relating to Accusations of Electoral Fraud were 15, spread across five pages; Accountability in Governance, 20, in five pages; reports on Loyal Opposition, six, in three pages; while those relating to Post-election Democratic Development were 63 in 12 pages.

Other political stories which, however, could not be grouped under any of the above-considered variables, were 180, all in a total of 26 pages.

(b) MAGAZINES

(i) *Newswatch*

During the month under review, *Newswatch* published a total of 212 pages. Of these, 36 pages were devoted to political issues. This was made up of 26 publications.

Stories/publications relating to Accusations of Electoral Fraud were three, spread across five pages; Accountability in Governance and Loyal Opposition, were nil; while those relating to Post-election Democratic Development were three, in 10 pages.

Other political stories which, however, could not be grouped under any of the above-considered variables, were 20, all in a total of 21 pages.

(ii) *The News*

During the month under review, *The News* published a total of 208 pages. Of these, 41 pages were devoted to political issues. This was made up of 65 publications.

Stories/publications relating to Accusations of Electoral Fraud were four, spread across four

pages; Accountability in Governance, four, in one page; reports on Loyal Opposition, two, in two page; while those relating to Post-election Democratic Development were 10, in 11 pages.

Other political stories which, however, could not be grouped under any of the above-considered variables, were 45, all in a total of 23 pages.

(iii) *TELL*

During the month under review, *TELL* published a total of 208 pages. Of these, 43 pages were devoted to political issues. This was made up of 76 publications.

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

Other political stories which, however, could not be grouped under any of the above-considered variables, were 67, all in a total of 27 pages.

(iv) *The Source*

During the month under review, *The Source* published a total of 144 pages. Of these, 26 pages were devoted to political issues. This was made up of 17 publications.

Stories/publications relating to Accusations of Electoral Fraud was three, spread across six pages; Accountability in Governance, nil; reports on Loyal Opposition was one spread across two pages; while there was none relating to Post-election Democratic Development.

Other political stories which, however, could not be grouped under any of the above-considered variables, were 13, all in a total of 18 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 during the month review a general air of press freedom which characterised the months before continued to prevail. 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 and April 1999 reports, 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.

Conversely, the existence of several restrictive press laws has served as a limiting factor for

journalists against publishing information, which were not confirmed by official sources.

Secondly, the fact that various legislation, including decrees and edicts which restrict press freedom still exist, remained the major contradiction of the Head of State's promise to respect the right to freedom of expression, including press freedom.

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, we recall again the Minister of Information, Chief John Nwodo Jnr's announcement in December last year that the government was working on 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. Indeed, some print media houses have begun to upwardly adjust their prices to reflect the new reality. Among them are *The Guardian*, *Post Express*, *This Day* and *The Punch* newspapers.

Though none of these increases has been specifically attributed to the VAT regime, the common denominator has been "increasing production cost".

Also, 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 which has been the hallmark of state-owned or controlled newspapers in Nigeria. 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.

Adjunct to this is the fact that several state government owned and the two Federal Government-owned newspapers having suffered excessive interference in their day-to-day management by government, have been unable to make an impact in the market or break even. They are presently being subjected to one form of hardship or the other by the refusal of appropriate authorities to release their statutory grant to procure necessary inputs and pay staff salaries. Some media organisations such as *Daily Times*, *New Nigerian* and *The Pioneer* are in default of salaries payment of up to nine months as at the month under review.

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 that for the second month consecutively, there has been a fall in the devotion of print spaces to political issues by all the newspapers monitored, some by as much as over 100 per cent. For example, *National Concord* which devoted as much as 122 pages to political issues in the month of March 1999 dropped down to 48 pages during the month under review.

The Diet on its part, during the month under review, devoted 55 pages to political issues as against a total of 131 pages during the month of March 1999. The same goes for *Daily Times*, which in March 1999 devoted 110 pages to political issues as against 51 pages during the month under review. The only exception this time is *This Day* newspaper which had its allocation of print-space to political issues raised from 97 pages in March 1999, to 136 pages during the month under review.

Meanwhile, the data in respect of the magazines which indicated a general inverse relationship to the trend noticed in the case of the newspapers in March now showed a marked decrease in the space allocation to political issues of over 100 per cent in all cases and up to 400 per cent in at least one case during the month under review.

For example *NewsWatch* showed over 400 per cent decrease in the number of pages allocated to political issues during the month of April 1999. It recorded 36 pages allocated to political issues down from its March 1999 allocation of 151 pages. The same trend was noticed with respect to *The Source*, *The News* and *TELL*.

From its 83 pages allocated to political issues in March 1999, *The Source* allocated a total of 26 pages to political issues during the month under review. *The News* on its part allocated 41 pages to political issues during the period of April 1999, down from 112 pages in the previous month. *TELL* allocated 43 pages to political issues in April as against 87 pages in March.

Meanwhile, for a proper and easier appreciation of the analyses relating to how the press reports activities around the variables and comments on those reports with respect to fair and objective reporting, this report 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 there was a substantial reduction on the print media reports on allegations of electoral fraud during the month under review. In the newspaper categories, *National Concord* led with 71 mentions while *The Guardian* followed with 44 mentions. Coming at the rear was *The Diet* with three mentions.

The magazines recorded four mentions by *The News* and *TELL* each and three mentions by *NewsWatch* and *The Source* each.

This reduction in attention given to allegations of electoral fraud is quite understandable given the resolution of the petition by Chief Falae, presidential candidates of APP / AD alliance.

As noted in the April 1999 report, there was also 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 in Chief Falae and Chief Egolom suits.

In the April report, Media Rights Agenda noted that it was a debatable issue whether to give value judgement on how a newspaper reports for example, pronouncement on issues of accusations of electoral fraud among others. But it was concluded that to get around this problem, the positions of the various newspapers monitored as reflected in their editorial comment, would form the basis of any inferences.

Hence, the April report concluded that in the main, press reports were generally fair and objective. It, however, concluded that some reports were considered unfair and lacking in objectivity. Some of those cases were duly pointed out and discussed.

To a much lesser extent, such positions were still discernable during the month of April under review. One of such is *The Punch* editorial of April 12. In the editorial titled: "For a Political Option", the newspaper took the position that it is against Chief Falae's appealing to the Supreme Court over the verdict of the Appeal Court which declared his petition alleging electoral fraud against General Obasanjo as baseless.

The reasons, the paper stated, were for "the interest of peace and stability in the country", and "more especially, our fear that some ambitious military officers may hijack a protracted legal battle - no matter how flimsy their excuse may be - to create tragic mischief in the strained polity."

It then called for the exploitation of "other political options."

The opinion of Media Rights Agenda, as stated in the April report, is that to bend democratic processes on the alter of fears, is to call for deformed democratic culture. It is MRA's believe that such a position is unfair and lacking in objectivity, both to the person of Chief Falae and on reporting on the

accusation of Electoral Fraud. It also does not augur well for the development of viable post election democratic order.

On the call by the newspaper for the exploitation of “other political options,” the impression it gives is that “a gentleman agreement” based on appeasement be reached between Chief Falae and General Obasanjo and their platforms.

It is note worthy that *Daily Champion*, whose editorial on this same subject in March was considered unfair and lacking in objectivity in the April report, had cause to change its persuasion.

In an editorial on April 20 titled: “Presidential Polls Verdict,” the newspaper took an over view of the Appeal Court verdict, hailing it as “a triumph of the rule of law and an advancement of the cause of democracy.”

It confessed that “the initial attempts to dissuade Falae from filing the petition were largely rooted in the fear that a Court action was likely to delay restoration of democratic rule.”

It, however, acknowledge the injustice of that attack on Chief Falae when it noted that: “But this amounted to an unwarranted attempt to deny the petitioner his fundamental right of access to the Court.”

b. Reports on Accountability in Governance

The data showed that, generally, there was a continued low focus on this variable by the newspapers monitored. While five of the newspapers monitored showed marked decreases in their focus on this variable, the other five showed mild increases. The *Post Express* led again on publications on loyal opposition with 32 mentions, followed by *Daily Times* with 20 mentions. At the rear is *The Diet* which recorded no mention at all. *Vanguard* recorded three and *The Guardian* two.

In the magazine category, *The News* led with four mentions while *Newswatch* and *TELL* and *The Source* all had none.

As was noted in the April report, 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 civilians are yet to assume office.

c. Reports on Loyal Opposition

The data shows that reports on this variable by the various newspapers monitored continued to be on the low side. The same goes for the magazines. While some of the newspapers monitored showed decreases in their mentions, others showed increases, although not very significant. Again, the focus on this variable is 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 Punch* led here with 25 mentions followed by *The Guardian*, *This Day* and

New Nigerian with 14 mentions each. At the bottom in this regard is *Post Express* with three mentions.

For the magazines, *TELL* and *The News* had two mention each, while *The Source* and *Newswatch* had none.

d. Reports on Post-Election Democratic Development

The data shows that while this is still the most mentioned out of the four main variables, by both the newspapers and magazines monitored, there was a general and substantial decline in the focus on this variable during the month under review compared to the previous month's data. Only *Vanguard* and *The Punch* recorded increases in their focus on this variable.

The Punch led here with 163 mentions closely followed by *Post Express* with 149 mentions. *The Guardian* stands at the third position with 114 mentions. Coming at the rear is *Daily Champion* with 15 mentions.

In the magazine category, *The News* led with 10 mentions, followed by *Newswatch* and *TELL* with three mentions each. *The Source* had none.

e. Reports on Other Stake-Holder Groups

The data shows that the press continued to accord the highest focus to this variable. There was however, a marked reduction compared to the focus it was accorded the previous month.

Post Express, however, led here with 301 mentions, followed by *This Day* with 200 mentions. Coming at the rear is *The Diet* with 72 mentions.

In the magazine category, *TELL* led with 67 mentions, followed by *The News* with 45 mentions. *Newswatch* recorded 20 mentions and *The Source*, 13 mentions to make the rear.

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 very few instances, when certain reports were unfair and lacking in objectivity.

One of which is *The Punch* editorial of April 12 discussed above in the treatment of the media reports on allegation of electoral fraud and investigative reports.

But some publications are noted to have stood out in their content and timeliness in helping to promote an enduring post-election democratic development.

Among those are various editorials calling on government to promogate the new constitution and others which addressed the fate of service chiefs and other top military officers presently holding or who have held political appointment.

They are so considered because they expressed fundamental issues relating to the fate of the civilian democratic government which Nigerians are all eagerly looking forward to come May 29, 1999.

Three of the most far-sighted of the editorials which addressed other timely issues are those

of *Daily Times* of April 9, *Post Express* of April 10 and *The Diet* of April 27.

In the *Daily Times* editorial titled: “The Code of Conduct Bureau,” the newspaper reviewed the calls by some Nigerians that the Code of Conduct Bureau should be scrapped by government for its inability to detect and raise a voice over General Abacha’s profligacy.

But the newspaper cautioned that such a move will amount to throwing away the baby and the bath water. It recommended that the body should, instead, be revitalized to ensure transparency in governance.

The Diet in its editorial titled: “An Electoral Process For The Future,” warned that in order that subsequent elections be controversy free, since it will be conducted during the tenure of a government which will be seeking re-election, consideration should be given to the setting up of a body of credible Nigerians to mind the country’s electoral process.

Thirdly, *Post Express* in an editorial titled: “Where Are The Parties,” expressed worry that after the February 27 presidential election, political parties have all gone in-active.

It noted that “the silence of AD, APP, PDP ... is unbecoming of political organisations that are supposed to lead their people or nation.”

Such editorials were not only timely but expressed concern over very topical political issues which are capable of shaping the future of politics of the Nation in the years ahead.

(ii) Conclusion

Media Rights Agenda affirms that the government has indirectly hindered the capacity of the print media to impart information in two ways during the month under review. First is in respect of the VAT regime over newspapers and magazines provided for in the 1999 budget. The prospect of payment of VAT by newspapers and magazines has shot-up production cost for the various print media.

Secondly, the interference in the management of government-owned media establishments and non-release of grants by the government to these media organisation to procure inputs and off-set workers salaries which in some cases have accumulated to upward of nine months, is greatly affecting the performances of journalists and media houses in question.

Media Rights Agenda also that there was a fair and objective coverage of the political programme during the month of April 1999 by the newspapers and magazines monitored.

However, as pointed out in the April report and again observed above, objections to a candidate going to Court over allegations of electoral fraud are considered not encouraging to the development of a viable democratic culture.

Media Rights Agenda is concerned about the declining attention accorded issues of accountability in governance and post-election democratic development. These two areas, ought to should generate much media attention at this crucial time in the transition to civilian democratic rule.

However, Media Rights Agenda commends all the newspapers which in their various editorial comments expressed strong, timely and positive positions on the various political issues that occupied public discussion during the month under review. Specifically, Media Rights Agenda commends *Daily Times*, *Post Express* and *The Diet* for their various editorial comments which are discussed 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 political programme by repealing all laws and decrees which inhibit the capacity of the media to report freely. In particular, the Government should review its VAT on newspapers and magazines policy and drop its reported plans to make libel a criminal offence.
- ◆ The Government should provide adequate protection for journalists and media workers against intimidations and attacks by thugs, supporters and members of political parties or candidates, and also investigate into all reported cases and prosecute those responsible.
- ◆ The Government should relinquish its ownership and control of newspapers to truly secure their independence. This practice of Government ownership of newspapers and magazines should immediately be abolished as it would bestow an unfair advantage on the ruling party in a multi-party democracy.
- ◆ It is hereby recommended that the press should henceforth shore-up their focus on investigative reporting and setting an agenda with regards to:
 - issues bothering on accountability and 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 and 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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