Print Media and Electoral Process in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT:

Elections in many developing countries such as Nigeria remain complex and cannot be handled solely by the government, as a vibrant print media is part of this exercise. Unfortunately, the Nigerian electoral process cannot be said to enjoy free, fair, and credible elections. The main objective of the study was to examine the role of the print media in the electoral process in Nigeria. Research design for the study was descriptive research, which combined both qualitative and quantitative methods. The sample was divided into two categories of a total of eight hundred and twenty (820) questionnaire respondents and sixteen (16) key respondents and interviewees from the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja and Lagos State, being the hub of media establishments and highly cosmopolitan locations in Nigeria. The study used survey, interview, and observation methods of data collection. Quantitative analysis was done using responses elicited from structured questionnaires. Content analysis of qualitative data was carried out on the selected 10 print media publications based on national spread. Coding and analysis of quantitative data were done, using descriptive statistics such as percentages and tables. Findings showed that the print media contributed to creating better perception of the nation's electoral process by international observers (Mean = 3.9497, St.D = 2.20417), the print media embarked upon improper reportage, selective coverage and failed to report actual happenings during elections because of undue influence by politicians and proprietors media establishments, thereby misinforming the people. The study concluded that the print media is important for smooth electoral process during the period of the study (1999-2019), despite challenges such as inadequate funding, and non-adherence to professional ethics by some print media journalists. The paper recommends that the print media should be protected from undue influence by politicians and proprietors, to strengthen the electoral process in Nigeria.
Keywords: Democratization, Institutions, Electoral Process, Good Governance, Print Media

ABSTRAK:

Pemilihan di beberapa negara berkembang seperti Nigeria bersifat kompleks dan tidak dapat ditangani sendiri oleh pemerintah, karenanya media cetak merupakan bagian dari sistem ini. Sayangnya, proses pemilihan Nigeria tidak bisa dikatakan dalam pemilihan yang bersifat bebas, adil, dan kredibel. Tujuan utama dari penelitian ini adalah untuk menguji peran media cetak dalam proses

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pemilihan di Nigeria. Desain penelitian untuk penelitian ini adalah deskriptif, yang menggabungkan metode kualitatif dan kuantitatif. Sampel dibagi menjadi dua kategori dengan total 820 responden kuesioner dan 16 responden utama dan orang yang diwawancarai dari Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja dan Negara Bagian Lagos, sebagai pusat media dan lokasi sangat kosmopolitan di Nigeria. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode survei, wawancara, dan observasi pengumpulan data. Analisis kuantitatif dilakukan dengan menggunakan respons yang diperoleh dari kuesioner secara terstruktur. Analisis konten data kualitatif dilakukan pada 10 publikasi media cetak yang dipilih berdasarkan penyebaran secara nasional. Coding dan analisis data kuantitatif dilakukan, menggunakan statistik deskriptif seperti persentase dan tabel. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa media cetak berkontribusi untuk menciptakan persepsi yang lebih baik tentang proses pemilihan negara oleh pengamat internasional (Mean = 3,9497, St.D = 2,20417), media cetak melakukan laporan yang tidak tepat, liputan selektif dan gagal melaporkan kejadian aktual selama pemilihan karena adanya pengaruh yang tidak semestinya yang dilakukan oleh politisi dan pemilik media, dengan demikian informasi yang diberikan kepada masyarakat tidak tepat .Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa media cetak penting untuk memperlancar proses pemilihan dalam kurun waktu penelitian (1999-2019), meskipun ada tantangan seperti pendanaan yang tidak memadai, dan ketidakpatuhan terhadap etika profesional oleh beberapa jurnalis media cetak. Makalah ini merekomendasikan bahwa media cetak harus dilindungi dari pengaruh yang tidak semestinya oleh politisi dan pemilik, sehingga dapat memperkuat proses pemilihan di Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Elections have been at the very heart of the expectations of many African nations' democratization since they have served some critical democratic purposes, especially in the promotion of political participation. Electoral crises in many African countries, including Nigeria, have made it important to interrogate the role that public administration can play in restoring the prestige of elections as a vehicle for stable democratic system (Akhakpe&Odion-Akhaine, 2016). Public administration places emphasis on interaction with the people for public good and in anticipation of the delivery of quality services to them without necessarily for any motive. This public good, when carried into the conduct of elections, could bring about peaceful interchange of government and the overall stability of the polity for sustainable development (Iguisi, 2015).

Elections in many developing countries are a complex exercise that cannot be handled solely by the government, as a vibrant press is part of this complex exercise, which (Easton, 1967) describes in the General Systems Theory a system that is made up of a combination of elements such as inputs, outputs, envi-

ronment, conversion process and the required feedbacks. Successful electoral process involves the people, democratic institutions, and the media. The tripartite approach to election administration is increasingly becoming the norm (Akhakpe & Odion-Akhaine, 2016). The history of the Nigerian State has evolved over the years. From the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial era, the press or print media has been at the vanguard of national development. The study covers the print media and the electoral process in the Nigerian Fourth Republic from 1999 to 2019. The period was selected because it is current, the longest, and uninterrupted civil rule since the nation's return to full-grown democracy (Fatile, Akhakpe, Igbokwe-Ibeto & Oteh, 2012). Emphasis was placed on the traditional print media, which is also called the press, because of its unique features of permanence, indefinite exposures, ability to be read severally, being more intellectually-engaging, better sectioning of topics for detailed analysis, and ease of content analysis over the electronic media such as radio and television.

Despite the penetration and wide usage, many social media information are fake, unverifiable and misleading; which make unqualified authors and commentators to dish-out misguided and unethical news that is at variance with the code of conduct that guide media practice in Nigeria (Ajibulu, 2016). The print media is usually compelled to undergo strict gate-keeping and verification process, by upholding accuracy, news verification, balanced reporting and impartiality. These cultures contrast that of online journalism or social media that has the freedom to report information without undergoing any verification process (Anindya, 2015). In democratic countries, media organizations had, over time, developed journalistic standards for vetting, and verifying information (Fukuyama, 2020). There are fifty-one (51) newspapers and magazines in Nigeria (Nigerian Finder, 2018). The selected print media that have wide coverage, high circulation and national spread for the study are: (a) Newspapers: The Punch, The Nation, The Guardian, The Sun, Nigerian Tribune,

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This Day, Vanguard and Daily Trust (b) Magazines: The News and Tell. The objectives of the study are; examine the role of the print media and its challenges in the electoral process in Nigeria.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS
DEMOCRACY

Democracy has been regarded as the most popular form of government across the world (Yagboyaju, 2016). Democracy is seen as a respecter of individuals as citizens, who can discern between rights and wrongs. Vibrant democracy promotes development and the enabling atmosphere for civil rule to flourish, especially where the media is allowed to perform its basic duties of educating, informing, and enlightening the people. Democracy promotes good governance by putting in place, processes and institutions that produce positive results that meet the needs of a society while making the best use of resources at their disposal. It serves as a veritable tool meant for national integration, socio-economic cohesion and other developmental indicators in a political system (Sarumi, Idowu & Adepoju, 2016). Democracy offers participatory opportunity for the citizenry in making choice and the selection of leaders through periodic election of credible representatives. There is virtually no democratic ethos in Nigeria because of the seemingly suppression of democratic institutions and dividends of democracy below the expectations of people (Lawal & Ogunro, 2012).

DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

Democratic institutions are the framework, formally established by the state, to achieve certain objectives. It could be for the purposes of running administration with ease in order to achieve efficiency, effectiveness, productivity and stability (Adamu, Haruna & Ibrahim, 2017). They are products of state decisions and policies; whether in the private or public sector, as the state in itself is an institution of a society. The state, acting

through its agent, the government is an association that has been set up to pursue those ends that will promote the well-being of its citizens (Idumange, 2013). A clear example of strong democratic institutions can be seen in the United States of America, where two unpopular policies of the Donald Trump administration were jettisoned, despite the enormous powers wielded by the American president. It has to do with the order by a federal judge that stopped the Trump administration from disallowing hundreds of thousands of immigrants to legally live and work in the US.

The policy had targeted mainly Muslim countries in a bid to end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival Programme and the policy of separating migrant families along the southwest border. About 240,000 immigrants from El Salvador, Haiti, Nicaragua and Sudan would have been affected and could cost US $132 billion in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), $5.2 billion in social security, medicare contributions and $733 million in employer turnover (Gomez, 2018). The importance of strong democratic institutions in a democracy cannot be over-emphasized because they are the cornerstone of stable governments. The electoral process that runs smoothly allows for the emergence of democratic leaders and institutions in a state.

DEMOCRATIZATION

Democratization can be explained under various contexts within a democracy. (Alumona, 2010) sees it as the process that occurs over a transition period of time, where the state and the populace are the stakeholder that shows commitments to ensure sustainable democracy. Democracy and its institutions, such as the public sphere or free press, are not understood and presented as processes of cultural and institutional change. Transitions often dovetail into elections and this explains why much emphasis is placed on democratization by election and from a minimalist's point of view, elections remain at the very heart of democratization. The import of this is that the success or fail-

134 ures of the transition processes depend largely on the democratic qualities of elections, measured by the degree of political participation, competition and legitimacy (Omotola & Onuoha, 2018).

Despite this reality, the impact of the Nigerian press in bringing about democratization has been of interest to public administration and political science researchers and scholars. Democratization, one of the mostly-used concepts in modern states, establishes a nexus between democracy and development. Democratization is the means while good governance is the end. When the arms of government such as the judiciary, legislature and other institutions, set up to play oversight roles in government become weak or corrupted, the media remains the only checker of abuse of power. A journalist is in a fiduciary relationship with the society by demanding utmost trust and confidence from leaders in this regard. This is in line with Development Media Theory that recognizes the fact that societies undergoing transition from underdevelopment and colonialism, to independence and development need to be strengthened by media institutions (Mishra, 2016).

PRINT MEDIA

The print media, which includes newspapers and magazines, is the chief mechanism for moulding peoples' opinions, has assumed a greater importance in both developing and developed countries of the world. No doubt, the influence of media technology in today's world can be a great asset to public agencies in terms of communications by allowing for effective collaboration (Eller, 2015). Section 22 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended), under Chapter II on the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy, gives an important obligation to the press, radio, television and other agencies of the media the freedom to uphold the fundamental objectives and make governments responsible and accountable to the people (Olayiwola, 2013).

Government institutions are meant to be democratic enough to actively consult non-governmental stakeholders in the formulation of laws and policies by ensuring that they serve public interest and are informed by the legitimate needs of the people. Access to public sector information allows citizens to be better involved in the policy-making cycle, promoting accountability for results and building citizens' trust in government institutions. Having the legislation in place such as the Freedom of Information Act (FoIA) 2011 in Nigeria should facilitate access to information requests and timely response to ensure that members of the public are not denied vital information (Moliki& Dauda, 2017). Proactive disclosure, such as release of information without requiring a formal information request, is essential for good governance while budget transparency also contributes to building trust.

Media and the political system are interconnected in terms of relationship, cooperation and complimentary activities that are geared towards promoting individual and collective interests by ensuring that good governance provides a sense of direction and control over the affairs of the state by protecting the rights of citizens and defending the rule of law (Ojo, 2015). According to (Nwammuo, Edegoh and Iwok, 2015), majority of the newspaper owners in Nigeria are politicians, which influenced their writings and positions on issues. This development is reflected in their coverage of electoral processes such as campaign speeches, debates, information on personality of candidates and programmes.

Journalists in Nigeria, like in most other developing democracies, are among the least paid or motivated in the world, just as they are poorly equipped for the task of critical journalism practice. Furthermore, Nigerian media has been criticized for engaging in 'protocol journalism' in which highly placed public officials are deliberately shielded from embarrassing questions and investigations in return for other considerations as well as the commercialization of news and biased reporting of events

136   that are contrary to professional ethics. Several attacks, acts of intimidation and arrests of journalists have been reported in Nigeria. According to (Ogbu, 2013), these problems render the media environment unconducive for professional and effective practice, noting that media practitioners are almost reduced to a zero level of independence.

Ethnicity is a challenge that Nigerian media is grappling with at the moment. The tenacity of this phenomenon has, however, compounded the dilemma of journalists, since it puts disrepute to their professional ethics, sense of moral and social responsibility. The media had displayed a high level of lack of unity and oneness, which could help democracy to grow (Ogbu, 2013). Furthermore, the current security challenges are posing huge threats to the practice of journalism and the sustenance of democracy in Nigeria. The ultimate aim of democratization in a democracy is to achieve good governance. Good governance is not practically the same thing as democratic governance in the sense that an authoritarian regime can be well-administered, just as a democracy can be mal-administered (Fukuyama, 2013; Mbada, 2016).

GOOD GOVERNANCE

Good governance that is associated with democracy and democratization is about effective and efficient structures providing optimal support to citizens in leading a safe, productive life in line with their desires and opportunities. It engenders and upholds broad commitment to public good and welfare by demonstrating the willingness, and ability to listen, discover and respond to the needs of the citizens (Devi, 2010; Mbada, 2016;). It engages state capability to get things done and further guarantees accountability and responsiveness to citizens' needs by satisfying the rights and fulfilling the needs of the people. In the process, it puts resources to good use and makes basic public services to work well to meet citizens' need for food to eat, water to drink, housing, employment, education, healthcare, secu-

rity and the opportunity to realize their potentials (Mbada, 2016).

ELECTORAL PROCESS IN NIGERIA

Electoral process is the stages involved in the course of holding successful elections. Elections in many developing countries are complex exercise that cannot be handled solely by the government and a vibrant press is part of this complex exercise. Organisations and agencies that are outside the state realm, electoral management institutions, and the electorate are required to work together to achieve the goal of credible elections wherever and whenever they are held at the federal, state and local government levels, since nobody or entity can effectively run elections alone (Akhakpe&Odion-Akhaine, 2016). Apart from recruiting competent election staff, their training in different areas of election administration cannot be overstated. Information communication technologies have equally become the norm in the administration of elections with respect to e-voting, e-participation, e-mobilisation and e-registration (Akhakpe & Ajumjum, 2016).

The media plays fundamental role in the electoral process in any country by helping the electorate to have an insight into the personalities of the political office seekers and their manifestoes. Before and after the general elections in 1999, 2003, 2011, 2015 and 2019, the print media, through critical journalism, offered useful analyses that gave people some insight into election process and assisted the electorate to reach rational discernment on matters relating to elections, but Nigeria cannot still be said to have flawless elections. A main feature of the electoral process is the tribunals. (Omonijo and Ogundele, 2011) made a case for election tribunals, which adjudicate over electoral cases, to adhere strictly to the time-frame given for them to carry out their assignments. The reason for this is that some candidates that lost during elections rush to the tribunals for possible redress. Judgments have been given in some of the cases while others are at various stages of trials. To ensure that justice

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is done, petitioners are expected to be able to complete their cases and get justice within the stipulated period, to prevent wrong persons from occupying offices, illegally. Section 285 Subsection 5(a) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) makes room that election petitions are expected to be filed twenty-one (21) days after the day of the declaration of results.

Trial of persons allegedly involved in electoral offences was reported in the media. For instance, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) officials were arraigned before the Chief Magistrate's Court in Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, South-West, Nigeria, over a nine-count charge, including misdemeanour, multiple thumb-printing of counted votes in willful attempt to void same and bribery, among other offences, during the State Assembly elections in the state. In the general elections, the media played an important role in disseminating information and creating new trends (Page & Tayo, 2018). The conduct of the 2015 general elections also attracted wide media coverage at the federal and state levels and the eventual defeat of President Goodluck Jonathan of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) by Gen. Muhammadu Buhari (retd.) of the All Progressives Congress, as well as the conceding of defeat by the former President, which elicited great coverage within and outside Nigeria in media reviews that doused serious tension that could have arisen had the PDP government contested the election results and decided not to hand-over power.

The autonomy of the electoral management body (INEC) has enabled it to assert some reasonable degree of authority over the electoral cycle and processes. A series of electoral reform initiatives have also boosted the professionalism, administrative capability and efficiency of the umpire. For example, the implementation of critical recommendations from the report of the Justice Uwais Electoral Reform Committee was particularly pertinent in the Nigeria case (Omotola & Onuoha, 2018). This is to ensure that the electoral body is strengthened to perform its

functions very well, as a democratic institution. This factor was of great significance in the 2015 general elections in Nigeria during which leading opposition parties merged and were able to pull resources together, better coordinate their activities, and led to the electoral success of the opposition parties (Hamalai, Egwu & Omotola, 2017). (Usman and Dasuma, 2014) have stressed the need for democratic institutions to be strengthened and encouraged, to promote free, fair, transparent and credible elections to elect quality leadership for good governance in Nigeria.Since 2015, concerns around security, economic hardship, recession, increasing unemployment and anti-corruption efforts have been the main challenges dominating public discourse. This period also saw a huge increase in the number of registered political parties and candidates. Nigeria's 2019 Presidential and National Assembly elections were keenly contested. There were ninety-one (91) registered political parties and seventy-three (73) presidential candidates. Another political party was registered by court order after the election, making a total of ninety-two (92) political parties.

However, the main contenders remained the ruling APC and the main opposition PDP, as was the case in 2015, with Muhammadu Buhari (APC) facing former Vice-President Atiku Abubakar (PDP). Both President Muhammadu Buhari and Atiku Abubakar are Fulani Muslims from Northern Nigeria, as both candidates campaigned mainly on the economy, security and anti-corruption efforts (The Commonwealth, 2019). On February 6, 2020, INEC stated that it had deregistered seventy-four (74) political parties from participating in subsequent elections in the country. The Chairman of INEC, Prof. Mahmood Yakubu, who made the announcement, said the parties failed to meet constitutional requirements that determine the continuous existence of political parties in the country. Currently, there are sixteen (18) registered political parties in Nigeria in line with the provisions of Section 225A of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria (as amended).

140   The National Peace Committee, led by General Abdulsalami Abubakar, former Head of State of Nigeria, organised the signing of a National Peace Accord on December 11, 2018 by all political parties to encourage the holding of peaceful and transparent elections. While the APC presidential candidate and a number of other candidates signed the National Peace Accord, the presidential candidate for the PDP and some opposition parties did not attend. The National Peace Committee convened a further event on February 13, 2019 with the participation of international partners to sign a new National Peace Accord in which the Commonwealth Secretary-General delivered goodwill message at the ceremony. This National Peace Accord was signed by the APC, PDP and other political parties, committing the presidential candidates and political parties to the prevention of violence and acceptance of the election results.

The Chairman of INEC announced the rescheduling of the elections by a week to the Election Day, due to logistical and operational challenges. The Presidential and National Assembly elections were postponed to February 23, 2019 while the Governorship, State Assembly and FCT Area Council elections were postponed to March 9, 2019. The INEC Chairman held a press conference on February 16, 2019 to brief the various stakeholders about the postponement. INEC also briefed the heads of observer missions about this development. It was against the above-cited political background that the 2019 elections took place. In accordance with international obligations, Nigeria signed and ratified key international instruments relating to the conduct of elections, including the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, among others.

The Not-Too-Young-To-Run movement sought to reduce, if not totally remove, the age requirement for running for elective

offices in Nigeria. The main goal of the movement was to promote increased youth participation in the political process. The age qualification for presidential candidates was lowered to thirty-five (35) years on May 31, 2018, when the President assented to the bill. The age qualification for the Senate remained at thirty-five (35), while that for the House of Representatives was reduced to twenty-five (25) under the Not-Too-Young-To-Run Act, 2018. (Ajodo-Adebanjoko, 2019) observes that poor funding and high costs of nomination forms for various offices still remain a major obstacle to youth representation in politics.

In the run-up to the 2019 general elections, the cost of nomination forms was as high as N45 million (US$125,000) for Presidential aspirants, N22.5 million (US$60,000) for Governorship aspirants, N7 million (US$19,000) for the Senate, and N3.8 million (US$10,500) for the House of Representatives. Few Nigerian youths are financially buoyant to pay these sums and, since donors and godfathers usually prefer old men whom they believe have the chances of winning, young people are naturally disenfranchised. Thus, while in theory, they are Not-Too-Young-To-Run, in practice, the youth find themselves Too-Poor-To-Run and in a dilemma of how to mobilise sufficient funds to be 'eligible' for representation (Ajodo-Adebanjoko 2019).

As of 2019, Nigeria was ranked 181st, out of 188 countries in terms of female representation in parliament, with 20 (5.6%) women Members of Parliament in the House of Representatives and seven (6.5%) in the Senate (IPU, 2019). At the 2015 election, 270 women candidates ran for election to the House of Representatives, comprising 15.2% of all candidates. In 2019, the percentage of women candidates fell to 12.3%, although the number of women candidates increased to 569. The Senate depicted a similar picture, because in 2015, 128 women contested the election, comprising 17.2% of candidates. In 2019, 233 women ran for the Senate, but represented only 12.6% of candidates.

In 2015, only one (7.1%) woman candidate contested the presi-

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dency, compared to six (8.2%) women in 2019. INEC had introduced measures to regulate the financing of candidates and political parties to avoid the undue influence of great wealth and special interests, misuse of state resources, vote-buying and other forms of electoral misconduct. It highlighted that one of the major factors, which has continually affected women's campaigns has been the problem of effectively raising funds. A recurring feature of the nation's electoral process is that youths are always being used as thugs to perpetrate political violence, as high unemployment rates had made them vulnerable to political bribery, incitement and vote-buying (The Commonwealth, 2019).

In January 2019, the Federal Government signed into law, the Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2018, to ensure full integration of PWDs into the society by establishing the National Commission for People with Disabilities and giving the Commission responsibility for their social, economic and civil rights. This is helpful as about 15% of Nigeria's population are PWD. Other intervention by non-governmental actors include BudgIT Foundation, which educated the public and campaigned against vote selling and buying across the fifteen (15) states across Nigeria; and the CLEEN Foundation, which monitored security threats and the conduct of the security forces in the electoral process, among others.

For the 2019 elections, there were hundreds of daily, weekly and monthly publications, according to the Nigerian Press Council such as Daily Trust, Vanguard, Leadership, Premium Times and The Punch; all privately-owned, as there were other popular daily newspapers within the country's six geopolitical zones. Privately-owned media are well-established and influential. Media freedoms are qualified by other laws, including those related to defamation, sedition, contempt of court and the Official Secrets Act. The Freedom of Information Act, which came into force in 2011, aims to strengthen good governance by making public records and information more freely available and accessible. Sections 99 to 101 of the Electoral Act also outlines the

basis for media coverage during elections (The Commonwealth, 2019).

According to (Jega, 2019), regular elections signify commencement of a journey on a liberal democratic trajectory, but only regularly held elections infused with appreciable, cumulative integrity could lead to, and result in, the actualisation of the objectives of democratic development. Electoral integrity is the absence of malpractices and fraudulent activities in the preparation, management and conduct of all aspects of the electoral process, which enables contestants and voters to engage with the electoral process with fairness, equity and justice such that the outcome is deemed as legitimate and acceptable. The range of malpractices and electoral manipulations found in many African nations suggest that elections are not perfect. In most African countries, and Nigeria in particular, elections are engaged by contestants, especially, incumbent office holders and/or governments with what is commonly called a 'do-or-die' disposition; to be won by any means necessary meaning that winning elections is, therefore, seen as an end in itself (Jega, 2019).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study has adopted both the Development Media Theory for analyzing the print media and General Systems Theory in examining the electoral process in Nigeria. The Development Media Theory was propounded in 1987 by Denis McQuail, a British Communication Theorist and Emeritus Professor at the University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands. The goals of the theory include the primacy of the national development task, the pursuit of cultural and informational autonomy and support for democracy solidarity with other developing countries. The theory advocates media support for an existing political regime and its efforts at bringing about national economic development by supporting government development efforts and media's support for society at large. The theory argues that unless a nation is well-established and its economic development

well underway, media must be supportive rather than critical of government as partners, and that journalists should promote development by implementing such policies. This theory recognises the need for some form of government intervention into the operation of media through government regulatory agencies, monitoring, training and licensing of media (Raza, 2012).

The theory underscores the importance of communication by stressing that development is impossible without communication. Therefore, the media, being the platform around which communication revolves, undertakes the role of executing positive developmental programmes, accepting restraints and orders from the state. In other words, it is proper and developmentally-essential for the media to yield itself to the politico-economic and socio-cultural needs of both the masses and the state (Eweka, 2017). Main features of the theory include getting the people to access good governance, discouraging of propaganda, generating genuine response from the audience, developing critical consciousness, two-way communication flow and aiding the development of communication tools (Mishra, 2016). The theory is applicable to countries like Nigeria with lower levels of economic development and with limited resources that take various forms, but essentially proposes media freedom under desirable conditions and favoured the ones in power.

The limited application of established theories of the media to majority of the Third World countries, which are vastly different from other Western countries, and the fast-changing economic and political conditions, have led to the birth of a new approach, whereby communication is used to carry out development tasks in line with nationally-established policy. Therefore, in the interest of the task of national development, the freedom of the media and of journalists needs to be moderated to an extent under the concept of the theory that outlined a new form of control in the society. The theory is inclusive (Mishra, 2016) and recognizes the fact that societies undergoing transi-

tion from underdevelopment and colonialism, to independence and development, through virile electoral process, often lack the full infrastructure, resources, traditions, professional skills and audiences needed to sustain and strengthen media institutions, as comparable to those of the advanced nations.

The General Systems Theory was adapted from the natural sciences in the works of the Austrian Biologist, Karl Ludwig von Bertalanffy (Ogundiwin, 2015). The theory found its way into the social sciences through Anthropology and Sociology. The General Systems Theory was further developed and domesticated in Political Science by David Easton, the Canadian-born American Political Scientist. The theory views an administrative system as a sub-system of the society. It looks at the various parts of an administrative system and examines the inter-linkages among the various parts by analyzing the dynamic interactions between the administrative system and its external environment, just the way the media can strengthen democratic institutions in the electoral process. Easton (1967) observes that a system is made up of a combination of elements such as inputs, outputs, environment, conversion process and the required feedbacks.

According to (Yalokwu, 2006) and (Koontz, 1980), almost all life is a system; that is the human body and that of governments, are all systems and each of them has interrelated parts, which work together to form a complex unity. The major features of systems consist of the whole, whereby a system is more than the sum of its parts. When it is open, it exchanges information, energy or material with its environment while a closed system is one that does not have interactions with its environment. However, (Katz and Khan, 1978) argue that all social systems are contrived systems in the sense that they are made by human beings and are imperfect systems. The relevance of theory to the study is hinged on the fact that a democracy should be seen as a total system, which has inter-related parts, for a single goal of providing good governance. Every part may have its own sub-goals but

146   these sub-goals tend towards the achievement of a central goal in the way and manner that the electoral process seeks to bring about good governance in a democracy.

Therefore, the sum total of the performance of democratic institutions affects the overall performance of the whole democratic set-up. The theory helps to identify and proffer solutions to specific organizational problems (Yalokwu, 2006). The print media creates the 'homeostasis', to 'achieve constant temperature in the face of a changing environment'. However, a major criticism or drawback of the theory is that it is considered as too abstract and broad for political analysis to take note of the complete psychological aspects of the interaction function.

RESEARCH METHOD

The paper adopted descriptive design. The population of the study comprised selected Print media in Nigeria which include, The Punch, The Nation, The Guardian, The Sun, Nigerian Tribune, This Day, Vanguard, Daily Trust, The News, and Tell. Abuja and Lagos were purposively selected being the hub of media establishment and most cosmopolitan locations in Nigeria. Multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted to select print media stakeholders, journalists and members of the public (respondents, who are not print media stakeholders and journalists) but have an understanding of public administration and the electoral process in Nigeria. 820 questionnaire were administered and 16 respondents interviewed to elicit data from Stakeholders, journalists and members of the public. The response rate of the questionnaire administered was 781(95.2%). For secondary data, the study surveyed and analyzed contents of editorials, news analysis, news stories, feature articles, readers' opinions, and advertorials in the selected newspapers and magazines, covering the study period (1999-2019). Data obtained were presented in tables and descriptive statistics and content analyzed.

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATIONS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Table 1 shows the data on and analysis of the respondents' views on the role of the print media in electoral processes, as follows: The interpretation of the analysed data therein are that on the average the respondents were of the opinion that the print media helped in sensitising voters about the electoral process (Mean = 4.3501, St.D = 0.82193). It was also perceived to have helped to ensure that the electoral body was properly funded through news reportage (Mean = 3.8511, St.D = 0.89238). Table 1 further shows that the print media helped to ensure that the electoral body was well-structured to enhance the credibility of elections (Mean = 4.0664, St.D = 0.95547), helped to enhance the peaceful conduct of elections in Nigeria (Mean = 3.8149, St.D = 0.89911), and helped in creating better perception of the nation's electoral process by international observers (Mean = 3.9497, St.D = 2.20417) within the time-frame of the study (1999

TABLE 1: ROLE OF THE PRINT MEDIA IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

S/N	Item	Location	SA	A	I	D	SD	Mean	St.D
1	It has helped in sensitising voters about the electoral process	Abuja (FCT)	164(54.7)	125(41.7)	4(1.3)	5(1.7)		4.4733	.71484
		Lagos	75(38.1)	98(49.7)	12(6.1)	8(4.1)	1(.5)	4.1624	.93351
		Combined	239(48.1)	223(44.9)	16(3.2)	13(2.6)	1(.2)	4.3501	.82193
2	It has helped to ensure that the electoral body is properly funded through news reportage	Abuja (FCT)	49(16.3)	184(61.3)	32(10.7)	33(11)	2(.7)	3.8167	.85956
		Lagos	49(24.9)	102(51.8)	30(15.2)	11(5.6)	4(2)	3.9036	.93995
		Combined	98(19.7)	286(57.5)	62(12.5)	44(8.9)	6(1.2)	3.8511	.89238
3	It has helped to ensure that the electoral body is well-structured to enhance credibility of elections	Abuja (FCT)	141(47)	118(39.3)	12(4)	26(8.7)	3(1)	4.2267	.94778
		Lagos	39(19.8)	107(54.3)	33(16.8)	14(7.1)	3(1.5)	3.8223	.91691
		Combined	180(36.2)	225(45.3)	45(9.1)	40(8)	6(1.2)	4.0664	.95547
4	It has helped to enhance the peaceful conduct of elections in Nigeria	Abuja (FCT)	63(21)	168(56)	31(10.3)	36(12)	2(.7)	3.8467	.91247
		Lagos	29(14.7)	115(58.4)	37(18.8)	11(5.6)	4(2)	3.7665	.87848
		Combined	92(18.5)	283(56.9)	68(13.7)	47(9.5)	6(1.2)	3.8149	.89911
5	It has helped in creating better perception of the nation's electoral process by international observers	Abuja (FCT)	81(27)	133(44.3)	39(13)	44(14.7)	1(.3)	4.0300	2.73019
		Lagos	40(20.3)	109(55.3)	29(14.7)	13(6.6)	5(2.5)	3.8274	.94796
		Combined	122(24.5)	242(48.7)	68(13.7)	57(11.5)	6(1.2)	3.9497	2.20417

Source: Field Survey (2020)

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- 2019). The implication of these interpretations is that the print media obviously played many tangible roles which were positive to the support of the electoral process in Nigeria during the period of this study.

From the interview responses, the Public Relations Officer (PRO) of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) further supported the findings from Table 1 by stating that the print media in Nigeria helped in getting information across to the people by aiding voter education and in passing down information during the last (2019) general elections. The PRO stated further added that the role of the print media in the electoral process in Nigeria during the period of this study was not totally positive. But that at some times, the print media operators played some negative roles. For instance, the PRO stated at some times, the print media journalists failed to report the actual happenings, thereby misinforming the people. This was noted to happen as a result of some of the journalists serving the interests of some of the politicians.

Nevertheless, it was perceived that the positive aspects of the performances of the print media outweigh the negative aspects, especially because of the fact that those who perpetuate the unwanted acts are fewer than those that uphold the professional ethics of their job. This flows with the prescription of the Development Media Theory that stresses the need for the print media to rather promote good governance, discourage propaganda, generate genuine response from the audience, develop critical consciousness, and two-way communication flow that will aid the development of communication tools (Mishra, 2016).

Also, the Director of Project Vote Initiative, Civil Society Organisation added that "The role of the print media in strengthening the electoral system in Nigeria is plethora and non-exhaustible; and cannot be effectively listed, even the Nigerian democracy is still evolving and improving and so will be the role of the print media in nurturing democracy." However, it was observed that the electoral process in Nigeria has not assumed

its full standard due to the stated unprofessional operations of some of the print media workers, but that it can be strengthened if the anomalies like improper reportage and selective exposure are reduced or eliminated. Without such a practice, the electoral system of Nigeria cannot be strengthened. The Programme Officer, Democracy and Governance, Justice, Development and Peace Commission (JDPC) noted that the strength of the print media during the period of this study was anchored on its agenda-setting role through developmental journalism. That the print media was able to use this strategy to promote the right agenda that led to promotion of democratic culture and ideals, especially through the education and sensitisation of eligible voters on the right candidates and in making informed choice at the polls.

It was discovered that the role of the print media in the electoral process in Nigeria was supportive or promotional. This is in the sense that the print media supported the electoral process in Nigeria through its publications, which sensitised voters on the process, pressured the government to give attention to the funding needs of the electoral body, and pressured the government and the electoral body for a provision for the structural needs of the electoral body. All of these helped to enhance the credibility of elections in Nigeria at the local, state, and national levels, especially by ensuring that elections became freer and fairer in comparison to past experiences. The discovery that the role of the print media in the electoral process in Nigeria was supportive or promotional is not out of place. Also, that the print media supported the electoral process in Nigeria through the various means stated before and tallies with the expected functions of the print media, a position supported by the General Systems Theory that stresses the need for systems inputs to proffer solution to specific organizational problems (Yalokwu, 2006).

(Anindya,2015) had emphasised in extant literature that the print media is usually and necessarily compelled to undergo strict

gate-keeping, being responsible for verifying the democratic process by upholding the principle of accuracy of information through news verification, balanced reporting and impartiality. In democratic countries, media organisations had, over time, developed journalistic standards for vetting, and verifying information (Fukuyama, 2020). This is in tandem with the principles of Development Media Theory that discourages the use of propaganda and encourages the generation of genuine response from the audience, developing critical consciousness, two-way communication flow and aiding the development of communication tools (Mishra, 2016). These are meant to promote electoral processes in any democracy in the world.

Democratisation cannot be said to be in place except democratic institutions are actively functional and engage various systems like the print media in their activities geared towards achieving the desired national goals and good governance. The finding that the print media used its newsprints as part of its means to sensitise the electorate for active involvement in the electoral process in Nigeria is in line with the assertion made by (Omotola and Onuoha, 2018) that democratisation and devel- opment share certain basic virtues such as popular participation and capacity expansion. This is because such sensitisations will usually promote popular participation and capacity expansion in the electoral processes in any democracy.

Promoting democratisation in Nigeria by the print media is a need that has been long overdue, especially because of the low performance and perception of the democratic machinery in Nigeria. (Oromareghake, 2013) corroborated this point by ob- serving that democratization has been greatly compromised by various forms of electoral malpractice since Nigeria's political independence in which credible elections have become a mi- rage. Despite being adjudged free and fair, the 2011 elections were said to have witnessed low participation by the electorate. This observation is in tandem with the earlier observation made by Usman and (Dasuma, 2014) that Nigeria's experience in de-

mocratization between 1999 and 2003 was scored low on the basis that responsible leaders with genuine interest of the people did not emerge, as the European Union Election Observation Mission report further states that elections in 2003 and 2007 were infamous for some flaws.

CONCLUSION

The print media largely supported the electoral process in Nigeria during the timeframe of the study. The print media offered the support through its publications, which were used to sensitise the electorate on the electoral process, by mounting of pressure on the national government to give attention to the funding needs of the electoral management bodies, and for effectiveness and efficiency even though print media journalists are negatively affected by poor working tools, inadequate remuneration and undue influence by owners of media organisations. The ultimate effect of these strategies culminated in the enhancement of the local and international perception of the credibility of Nigerian elections. This was so by ensuring that Nigerian elections became relatively freer and fairer in comparison to the past experiences even though the issues of violence, faulty leadership emergence procedure, and corruption still dominate the electoral process in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper recommends as follows:
1. Print media journalists should be adequately remunerated and provided with sufficient working tools to discharge their duties effectively in Nigeria.
2. Owners of media organisations should avoid undue interference with the work of print media journalists to enable them perform their duties better in the electoral process in Nigeria.
3. More investigative journalism should be carried out by print media journalists to identify challenges facing electoral pro-

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4. Print media journalists should adhere to their professional code of ethics to reduce bias and corrupt practice in the course of news reportage in Nigeria.

5. Print media should intensify efforts at voter education, and civic education to strengthen the electoral process in Nigeria.

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