

**DEEPENING DEMOCRATIC CULTURE FOR GOOD  
GOVERNANCE  
IN THE POST 2011 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA:  
AGENDA FOR THE MEDIA**

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**Abstract**

*The trend all over the world, even in the most autocratic system, is the gravitation towards democratic and responsive governance. Good governance is premised on mass participation prompted by the entrenchment of democratic culture. The media institution has been found to be a powerful ideological bloc with the capability of promoting and entrenching dominant policy statement in the public domain. The April 2011 general elections marked a systematic and dramatic u-turn in the process of government change and ascension to power in Nigeria. The elections, popularly acclaimed to be free, fair and transparent, were applauded by Nigerians. The challenge now, is how to sustain the structures and processes that produced the outcome by sensitizing the Nigerian public to the imperatives of internalizing the procedures and abiding by the rules of the game for maximum dividend.*

**KEYWORDS:** Democratic Culture, Good Governance, Media Agenda, Electoral Process

**Introduction**

The wind of change that started blowing across the globe in the twentieth century has caught up with (even) the most autocratic and despotic nations, Egypt, Kenya, Libya, etc, of the world. Pressures within and outside nations, developed, transitional (developing) or underdeveloped have endeared them to the democratization phenomenon being preached by the Western world.

Democracy, as a form of government run on the consent of the citizenry as well as for the interest of the masses, has been acknowledged as the form of government that brings about good governance. According to Stromback (2005:332), democracy “is the form of government that respects freedom of speech, expression and information, and the independence of media from the state”.

However, for democracy to thrive there must be periodic and regular elections through which the citizenry is expected to determine those who govern on their behalf, as well as the party whose manifestoes they subscribe to. Thus, a regular election is the pillar of democracy, and democracy is a major prerequisite for good governance.

## **Democracy and Good Governance**

Democracy as a form of government has gravitated from the traditional “Athenian” state to the modern participatory and representative method democracy. In line with the new development, Trappel and Maniglio (2009:171) identified three prototypes of democracy – the elite or minimalist democracy, the participatory democracy, and the deliberative democracy. According to the duo minimalist democracy refers to the political system that is governed by political elites who are presumed capable of making public decisions as well as protect individual liberty. Participatory democracy is conceived as that democracy that is value-laden where a strong ethos of citizens’ involvement, political equality, and tolerance play crucial roles. In this method, democracy is sustained by dedicated citizens. Deliberative democracy, however, involves collective decision-making with the participation of all who will be affected by the decision or their representatives. Citizens have the opportunity to deal with political issues in deliberative ways.

It is imperative to note that the emphasis in the modern democracy is not only on participation, but on providing a public sphere for argumentation through which superior ideas triumph. The deliberative part of daily life upon which informed decisions that will enhance accountability and good governance is based.

Governance, according to Kaufmann (2005) refers to “the traditions and institutions which authority in a country is exercised for the common good”. It connotes, in most cases, the different ways through which individuals, institutions or governments manage their affairs. Governance as a concept is different from government. “Governance does not mean government, but the framework of rules, institutions and established practices that set limits and give incentives for the behaviour of individuals, organizations and firms” (Hamelink and Nordenstreng (2007:230). Governance is a process or framework through which governments operate. Governance, according to Hermelink and Nordenstreng (2007), is “seen as a process in which a variety of interests are coordinated through different forms of networks and forums”

“Effective (good) governance means competent management of a country’s resources in a way that is fair, open, accountable and responsive to people’s needs”. (Servaes, 2009:62). To achieve effective management of resources in any nation, Kaufmann (2005) identified three dimensions, namely, the political dimension, the economic dimension and the institutional dimension. According to Kaufmann, governance entails.

- (i) The process by which those in authority are selected, monitored, and replaced (the political dimension)
- (ii) The government’s capacity to effectively manage its resources and implement sound policies (the economic dimension), and,
- (iii) The respect of citizens and the state for the country’s institutions (the institutional dimension).

In a somewhat and related categorization, Servaes (2009:64) identifies the four stages involved in governance as:

- (i) the process by which governments are selected, monitored and replaced.
- (ii) the capacity of the government to formulate and implement sound policies effectively.
- (iii) the respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic, political and social interactions among them, and,
- (iv) the capacity for active and informed economic, social and political dialogue among citizens within a public sphere.

### **THE DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS IN NIGERIA**

The democratization process requires systematic and periodic elections for it to be maintained and sustained. One of the hallmarks of democracy is putting in place structures that can guarantee a systematic and unbiased process of ascending to political offices as well as changing or transferring power from one person or party to another. When the process is free, fair and transparent; politicians, political office holders, democratic institutions, and the government enjoy credibility and legitimacy. However, any system that is devoid of a free and fair process of enthroning government is usually characterized by crises and political instability.

The Nigeria political system has remained largely unstable and practically unsustainable, especially, since the nation became independent. Elections in Nigeria, especially, since independence in 1960 have been characterized by violence, thuggery, manipulations, etc., such that election results or outcomes usually fall below the expectations of the citizenry. Previous elections in Nigeria were characterised by ballot box snatching, ballot box stuffing, results alteration and falsification, and violence, both before, during and after elections. According to Yaqub (2011):

Campaign days in some states were as bloody as election days when ballot materials were snatched at gunpoint, even in many cases, in the presence of hundreds of helpless voters. Results were altered at collation centres in favour of candidates who clearly lost the people's votes. Some states' results were announced in Abuja while counting of votes was still going on in those states.

In those dark days, politicians connived with electoral officers, security agents and even, judicial officers to deprive the citizenry from enjoying the services as well as the political leadership of the people of their choice. The electorate became so despondent to the extent that it became difficult to fathom the possibility of ever conducting a credible election in Nigeria. The situation became more hopeless and gloomier in the 2003 and 2007 (especially) elections. The much-talked and long-awaited Fourth Republic that took off in 1999 jolted the entire citizenry in that the dominant features of the previous elections and republics – 1963, 1979, 1989, 1993, etc., that brought about the collapse of the republics reared their ugly heads in modernized and sophisticated garbs. Although, political players and stakeholders criticized the inadequacies in the 1999 general elections, they, however, tempered their criticisms as they attributed all the observable flaws to the fact that the military organized and supervised the transition.

However, they became bewildered in 2003 and 2007 elections, when politicians nakedly demonstrated power of incumbency in nominating and featuring candidates for the elections. Political heavyweights and godfathers flagrantly disobeyed court injections and undermined people's choices and forced their candidates on the party as well as ensure their candidates' victory "by-force-by-fire". A case in mind was the pronouncement by former president, Olusegun Obasanjo prior to the 2007 general elections that the election would be a "do-or-die" for the PDP. Ostensibly, the President wanted his lieutenants to win at all cost. And, true to his promise, they won the elections, even in places where voting did not take place.

In Nigeria, transition from one government to the other, either military to civilian, or civilian to civilian, is usually greeted by violence, manipulations and in some cases coup d'état. According to Jibo (2003:3)

...similar ones (elections) which were held by democratic regimes in 1964 and 1983 failed to sustain democracy in the

country. Shortly after both elections were held, Nigeria witnessed coup d'état in 1966 and 1983.

However, the 2011 general elections marked a turning point in the electoral history and democratization process in Nigeria. The election showed that a major hurdle in the country's quest for democracy and good governance had been crossed. Although, one may say that Nigeria may not have reached its "Eldora do", the 2011 election was a clear manifestation that Nigeria has left "Egypt" because it showed a remarkable improvement on both the 2003 and 2007 elections.

It is imperative to note that in spite of all the fears and misgivings expressed by the political class in the build up to the 2011 general elections, Nigerians - young and old, at the end of the exercise agreed that the election was one of the best elections ever organized in the country. Many observers including "the international community can not wish away the fact that the results of the elections are reflections of the votes genuinely dropped and counted" (Yaqub, 2011).

The election, no doubt, clearly showed some improvement in the preparation and conduct of elections in Nigeria. Though some irregularities were observed, "there is hardly anywhere in the world where elections are held without irregularities, no matter how little" (yaqub, 2011)

The commendation by the citizenry as well as organizations – both local and international that the 2011 election was free, fair and credible became more revealing a few months after swearing-in winners at both the federal and state levels. The acceptance, reception and support given to the elected officials became unprecedented in the democratic history of Nigeria. In some states of the federation, especially in the South West where ACN dislodged the ruling PDP (Ogun, Oyo, Edo), peace and tranquility suddenly returned to the states known for violence, thuggery, assassination and cultism. Groups, associations and organisations such as market men and women, roads transport associations, etc. organized rallies in support of the new governments. Some associations embarked on price-cut of goods and services to pledge their loyalty and support for the government. The development showed that the eventual winners were the candidates they voted for.

The 2011 election has successfully redefined election and electoral processes in Nigeria, as well as the drive towards legitimacy and good governance in Nigeria. According to Yaqub (2011), "the 2011 campaigns, candidates, conduct of electoral officers, security agents, voters, as well as the voting patterns during elections in most places are indications that Nigerians are determined to deepen democracy".

"Now that the standard has been set and that in Nigeria, free and fair elections can be organized and conducted successfully if only what is to be done is done; the challenge now is how to sustain and improve upon the feat achieved by democratic institutions and stakeholders, in which the media institution is one, in the 2011 general elections in Nigeria, as well as making the citizenry imbibe and internalize democratic culture.

#### **DEEPENING DEMOCRATIC CULTURE – AGENDA FOR THE NIGERIAN MEDIA**

The media institution, one of the state ideological apparatuses, occupy a critical position in the political system of any nation, be it democratic or autocratic. The media institution exerts a lot of influence in charting, determining and entrenching the dominant political culture in any country.

According to Trappel and Maniglio (2009),

...modern democracy and the mass media are intrinsically related. In modern democracies the mass media are the link between those who govern and those who are governed. The two are intertwined and mutually dependent in that, this media need democracy for proper functioning because that is the only form of government that allows for freedom of speech or expression as well as free information-flow. Also, democracy needs the media because it is through the media that participatory and deliberative democracy can be achieved and institutionalized.

The role of the media in any democratic set-up can never be underestimated. The media system, according to McChesney (2000) performs two indispensable functions in any democratic system. First, the media “provide a rigorous accounting of people in power and people who want to be in power in both public and private sectors”. This is referred to as the “watchdog role” of the media. And second, the media “provide reliable information and a wide range of informed opinions on the important social and political issues of the day”

In a somewhat similar manner, Gurevitch and Blumler (1990:25) categorized the functions performed by the media in a democracy as:

- (i) Surveillance of the socio-political environment, reporting developments likely to impinge, positively or negatively, on the welfare of citizens.
- (ii) Meaningful agenda – setting, identifying the key issues of the day, including the forces that have formed and may resolve them.
- (iii) Platforms for an intelligible and illuminating advocacy by politicians and spokespersons of other causes and interest groups.
- (iv) Dialogue across a diverse range of views, as well as between power holders (actual and perspective) and mass publics.
- (v) Mechanisms for holding officials to account for how they have exercised power.
- (vi) Incentives for citizens to learn, choose and become involved, rather than merely to follow and kibitz over the political process.
- (vii) A principled resistance to the efforts of forces outside the media to subvert their independence, integrity, and ability to serve the audience.
- (viii) A sense of respect for the audience member, as potentially concerned and able to make sense of his or her political environment.

The media institution has been variously classified in the literature according to the functions it performs in a democratic setup. Trappel and Maniglio (2009:175), while citing Kaarle Nordenstreng, capture media functions in a democratic society in four different classifications namely, pluralist, administrative, deliberative and direct. These classifications have been found to guide media roles. According to Trappel and Maniglio, in pluralist democracies, the media work towards guaranteeing individual freedom; in administrative democracies, the media become instruments to be used by expert bodies to inform the public about their actions and practices; in deliberative democracies, the media assist citizen in becoming involved in issues of public interest; and in direct democracies, the media provide channels for all voices in society.

The media are expected to be instrumental to the entrenchment of all-inclusive participatory and deliberative democracy. The citizenry must be provided access to the decision-making process in order to ensure qualitative democracy. A quality democracy, according to Trappel and Maniglio (2009:177), is the “one that provides its citizens a high

degree of freedom, political equality and popular control over public policies and policy-makers through the legitimate and lawful functioning of stable institutions”. The media, through their information and cultural orientation functions, promote participation of the citizenry in the democratic process as well as mobilize them for active involvement in policy and decision-making activities in the polity.

### **THE MOBILIZATION MODEL OF THE MEDIA**

The media in the twenty-first century have been found to, through information function, possess power that often influence and mobilize the citizenry in requesting for and adopting reforms where and when necessary. The contemporary media institution is governed by the new tradition of social responsibility - a paradigm that is hinged on media's commitment to the pursuit of public morality and enlightenment. The new media paradigm is centred on “the public's right to know” duty of the media.

The mobilization model of the media, according to Proress et al (1991) is anchored on the principle that the media through information dissemination become a catalyst for change. According to Proress et al (1991:15), “the press (media) tells the public what they need to know, the people then decide what they want and the press (media) helps communicate these decisions to policy makers”. The media through published materials exert great influence on the public by encouraging them to jettison old attitude and beliefs, and to adopt new ones.

### **THE ROLE OF THE NIGERIAN MEDIA IN DEEPENING DEMOCRATIC CULTURE**

In furthering and deepening democratic culture, especially after the 2011 general elections, the Nigerian media have to, as a matter of necessity, redefine its role in the political structure. A paradigm shift from the old order of passive reporting to a new order of active participation and involvement in decision-making as well as information generation and dissemination must become a priority.

According to Ettema (2007:145),

Journalism cannot be content to passively transcribe that reasoning or to uncritically preside over a forum for its presentation. Journalism must itself be a reasoning institution that aggressively pursues, rigorously tests and compellingly renders reasons that satisfy the key criterion of deliberative democracy.

Democracy needs information to thrive and abundant information to and from the “governor” to the “governed” must be provided by the media. Sufficient and educative information that will help the citizenry in taking informed decisions must be generated and produced by the Nigerian media. The ultimate role of the media is “helping citizens toward adequate understanding” (Schudson, 1996:213). Schudson (1996) argues further that, “if the press (media) cannot communicate effectively about government to the people at large, it can nonetheless hold the governors accountable to the relatively small number of other informed and powerful people”. Sufficient, current and relevant information that will enable the citizens to be free and self-governing must be generated and circulated by the Nigeria media.

The Nigerian media can help deepen and sustain democratic culture by galvanizing and motivating the citizenry to develop interest and actively participate in politics. Enduring democracy can not be built on or sustained by elected elites, but built on and sustained by the actions of a large number of people.

According to Trappel and Maniglio (2009) while citing Stromback (2005),

democracy is sustained by dedicated citizens; the more people are politically interested, the more they engage in associations and civic organizations, the more they vote, the more they develop attitudes and norms of generalized reciprocity, the better.

The Nigerian media should also provide forums (fora) for intellectual discussion or deliberation of issues affecting the citizenry. This “public sphere”, according to Curran (1991) can be visualized as a “core surrounded by satellite networks and organized groupings”. The core public sphere is the public space where all interests interact with one another in seeking to establish agreement or compromise about the direction of society (Curran, 1991). The public sphere is a neutral zone where access to relevant information affecting the public good is widely available, where discussion is free of domination by the state, and where all those participating in public debate do so on an equal basis. Such “public spheres” should be promoted and supported by the media by making available factual information that will enhance the achievement of informed discussions by participants.

Furthermore, the Nigerian media should facilitate organized debates spanning political, social, cultural and economic issues. Essentially, political debates where parties and candidates are encouraged to unfold their manifestoes, as well as explain how pressing issues are to be resolved should be the priority of the Nigerian media. Thus, according to Ettema (2007:145),

if journalism ought to encourage debate ... then we must ask journalism to not merely record the processes of deliberation, but also to act as a reasoning participant in those processes. We must ask journalism to embrace a further paradox; to function as both a fair-minded moderator and a committed speaker.

Thus, according to Ettema (2007), the polity needs information, but “the kind of information it needs can be generated only by vigorous popular debate”. Ostensibly, the job of the media is to encourage debate, not only to supply the public with information.

The Nigerian media, more than ever before, should facilitate equal representation in both the political process and decision making process. The media system should act as “an agency of representation”. The media should see to it that all diverse social groups and organizations (minority groups) who express alternative view points are accommodated. Curran (1991:103) posits that, the media system

... should assist collective organizations to mobilize support; help them to operate as representative vehicles for the views of their supporters; and aid them to register effective protests and develop and promulgate alternatives.

Similarly, the Nigerian media should embrace a new paradigm of “multiperspectivism” in their approach to news selection and reportage. According to Gans (1979), “multiperspectivism” refers to an alternative news model whereby the media would collect information (news) from a much larger number of more scattered and less accessible sources. It represents a paradigm shift from the old order of selection and systematic

exclusionary approach. The approach recommends reporting the activities and opinions of the people from all the different population sectors. This method will confer on every citizen a sense of belonging as well as provide avenue for robust discussions that will give birth to quality decisions.

### **Conclusion**

The Nigerian media, having fought and won for the nation democracy, it has become imperative for the “press (media) to redefine its role and re-orientate itself towards sustaining the democracy it has helped to midwife” (Jason, 2000). In sustaining and deepening democratic culture, the Nigerian media must ensure that, access to information and the quality of information are vital factors in re-orientating and reshaping the perceptions, attitudes and behaviour of individuals and groups. (Jason, 2000:115). And, since Nigeria has just emerged from a traumatic past characterized by diverse electoral fraud and manipulations, the Nigerian media, according to Olukotun (2000), need to “gain more than a foothold in the information age, to take advantage of new technologies and global networkings so as to live up to the expectation of the citizenry. It is imperative to admit that, “major improvements are necessary in the Nigerian media industry to make it a dependable partner in the quest for democracy and good governance in the country” (Jibo, 2003:26).

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