

MASS MEDIA AND NIGERIAN POLITICAL CLASS: PARTNERS IN PROGRESS OR STRANGE-BED FELLOWS?

ALIEDE, E. Jonathan, Ph.D

Department of Mass Communication
National Open University of Nigeria
Jabi, Abuja, Nigeria

Abstract

This study is an attempt to identify the relationship between the Nigerian political class and the nation's mass media. Controversy has trailed the kind of affinity between the two as some contend it is rosy, while others insist it is frosty. The study used qualitative research method to source relevant data from earlier studies in the area. To further illuminate the study, social exchange and social responsibility theories were applied as the theoretical basis. The study revealed that the relationship between the Nigerian political class and the Fourth Estate of the Realm is actually adversary and not cordial, hence affirming the notion of strange-bed fellows in their relation, rather than partners in progress. It identified that, though diligent in their statutory duties, the press have faced severe adversity under both military and civilian regimes in the country with the attendant consequences. Accordingly, the study recommended that the political class and government should treat the press fairly; cultivate cordial, functional and mutually-beneficial partnership between them so as to facilitate their collective roles towards Nigeria's socio-economic and political development.

Keywords: Mass media, Fourth Estate of the Realm, Politics, Political class, Governance, Social responsibility

INTRODUCTION

The mass media engender and provide the communication required for effective governance, politics and overall development of other facets of the society, (Aliede & Ogodu, 2018), (McQuail, 2005; (Moemeka, 2000; Uche, 1999; Nwosu, 1990 and UNESCO, 1980). Consequently, the press assist the political class in attaining its set objectives.

The mass media perform multiple roles towards the growth and development of politics, governance and democracy, not only in Nigeria, but globally. The Nigerian democratic experience cannot be separated from the vibrancy of the mass media. While it is claimed that well educated and informed citizenry are asset to democracy and governance, the mass media serve as the purveyors of popular opinion that enable the elite to take their decisions. Right from the struggle for Nigeria's self-determination, the press have always been on the lead for revolutionising the political process. It is in this vein that Onwumah (2015) notes that in Nigeria's struggle for independence, the media played key roles towards its actualization. The mass media provided the information, consciousness and awakening the people required to appreciate the dangers and evils of colonial rule and on the other hand, the benefits of self-determination.

Therefore, the issue and question of education, information, sensitisation and mobilization which have become crucial factors in the realization of national objectives in the context of the electoral process illuminate the prime place of the mass media in politics. Iredia (2007, p.12), a former Director General of Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), gives a hint to the relationship between the mass media and politics when he notes that:

The people must be assisted to premise their choices of rationality and vote wisely during elections. They must have all information that is needed to elect the right candidates who can ensure good governance. Where such

public awareness is lacking, those of us in the media must accept a share of the blame of failed elections in Nigeria.

Like many other analysts, Okoye (2009) believes that anywhere in the world, the press is involved in politics, formation of public opinion, perception of images of candidates for political offices, the definition of social reality and social norms, education, information, enlightenment and entertainment of the public, as well as the presentation and clarification of issues, values, goals and changes in culture and society. In view of the forgoing, Fog, (2004) and Kellner (2004) note that the mass media constitute the brain box of democracy. The media help in the supply of the necessary political information that electorates would base their decision on. They are the watchdogs for uncovering errors and wrongdoing by those in power.

Sheila (2015) believes that since the 17th Century the role of the press as the Fourth Estate of the Realm and as forum for public discussion and debate has been recognized. Today, despite the mass media's propensity for sleaze, sensationalism and superficiality, the notion of the media as watchdog, as guardian of public interest and as conduit between governors and the governed remains deeply ingrained.

The reality, however, is that the mass media in reporting politics are often accused of not always living up to the ideal. At the same time, they are hobbled by stringent laws, monopolistic ownership, and sometimes the threat of brute force. State control is not the only constraint. Effective and professional reporting is difficult to sustain in competitive media markets that put high premium on the shallow and sensationalism. The media are sometimes used as proxies in the battle between rival political groups and in the process sow divisiveness rather than consensus, hate speech instead of sober debate and suspicion rather than social trust. In these cases, the media contribute to public cynicism and

democratic decay. Onwumah (2015) and Aliede (2003) point to this when they note that at independence, the role of the media in nation building process became ambivalent. The media, especially in the Second Republic, adhered to the truth and upheld objectivity only when it suited them. They were influenced by ethnic, religious and other considerations such as pecuniary benefits and media ownership.

This, accordingly ignites the question as to whether the relationship between the media and politics is cordial or that of cat and dog? Okunu (2007, p. 83) observes that there is an unfriendly relationship between muckrakers (journalists) and key government personnel as well as captains of industries because the latter perceive muckrakers as enemies of progress, thus, regarding them as cog in the wheel of progress.

As well, Sheila (2015) concurs that the media shape public opinion, but they are in turn influenced and manipulated by different interest groups in the society. The media promote democracy by, among other things, educating voters, protecting human rights, promoting tolerance among various social groups and ensuring that governments are transparent and accountable. The media, however, can play antidemocratic roles as well. They can create fear, uncertainty, escapism, division and violence. Instead of promoting democracy, they can contribute to democratic manipulation, he claims.

Beyond political information, education and mobilization, the mass media should by the provisions of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, as amended; the media should hold governments responsible and accountable to the masses by checking the excesses of leaders and political officer holders. The media are expected to perform this role to the admiration of many, not only in Nigeria, but also in many parts of Africa and other parts of the world. Bettina (2003) notes that the down fall of despotic governments all over the world is due to the mass media working to promote democracy and deepened political culture. In Latin America, for

instance, the down fall of Andres Perez of Venezuela in 1993, Abdala Bucaram of Ecuador in 1997 and Alberto Fujimori of Panama in 2000. North Africa and parts of Middle East faced similar revolutions in 2011 as the Nicholas Maduro's fledgling administration in Venezuela has been epileptic for long, while Omar al-Bashir of Sudan lost his clutch to power in 2019. This is still due in large measure to investigative reporting on their complicity in corrupt deals, maladministration and despotism. Such reporting has made the press a credible and prestigious institution, hence an ally of the people in the sustenance of democracies all over the world. On the power of the press to suppress bad governments and promote democracy, Tanjung (2001) further observes that:

In Southeast Asia's new democracies, sustained reporting on malfeasance in public life has resulted in the ouster of corrupt officials and raised public awareness on the need for reform. In the Philippines, investigative reporting provided evidence that led to impeachment charges filed against President Joseph Estrada in 2000 and fuelled public outrage against his excesses. Estrada was ousted from office in a popular uprising on the streets of Manila in January 2001. In Thailand, investigative reports unearthed evidence of the shadowy business dealings of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. In Indonesia, the press has uncovered wrongdoing that led to the filing of charges against high officials, including the powerful speaker of Parliament, (Akbar Tanjung, 2001, p. 48).

In Nigeria, the case of the mass media promoting politics and the process of governance is noticeable and clearly evident in the manner the Fourth Estate reports the activities of governments and those who hold offices in trust for people. This is supposed to engender mutual relationship. But has it? Therefore, exploring the kind of relationship between the mass media and government/political class in Nigeria is the major task before this study.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Scholars have been concerned for centuries with the possible influence of the media of communication on the formation of public opinion and attitudes, but there have been divergent and diametric opposing views on the subject. Many communication scholars, among them: Daramola (2013), McQuail (2010), Sambe & Nyitse (2007), Adesoji (2006), Akinfeleye (2003), Nwosu (2003) and Aliede (2003) argue that the mass media and politics in Nigeria are interwoven. The perception and claim is that the mass media are the driving force of politics and its processes, but nature of the relationship between the two institutions has been rarely properly and closely examined. Therefore, this vital area is still vague and needs further x-raying.

Again, studies and discourses on media and politics in Nigeria tend to be skewed towards the effect of the mass media on politics and political processes, yet the studies hardly enquired deeply into the effect of politics on the mass media. What role have the media played or should play for there to be vibrant, people-centred and impactful political system is more often the subject of enquiry in communication studies. What politics should do for the media is less in contention, even though it is as important to carry out studies to find out what the political system should do to ensure the prevalence of vibrant press in Nigeria.

In the course of the Nigerian 2019 General Elections, such challenges like voter education and political apathy arose and critics tended to blame the media for not performing their roles of voters mobilisation. Nevertheless, the media did not shun this responsibility, just as they never did in other facets of the nation's life. Yet, the government has, notwithstanding such partnership roles, very often acted in unfriendly posture towards the press. For instance, despite wide and popular opinion of Nigerians and civil societies, the Federal Government illegally and unilaterally amended (against the recommendation of the NBC Board) the National Broadcasting Code, stipulating N5m as the fine against 'hate speech'. Its first casualty,

according to Ikpoto (2020) is Nigeria Info, a Lagos based FM station. While slamming the fine on the station, NBC spokesman claimed any speech intended to ‘abuse, insult or denigrate our leaders and those in authority – president, governors, MPs’ would be guilty of the law as it is ‘not our culture’ to do so. This has attracted wide condemnation of all sections of the media, stakeholders, politicians and the entire society as it is clearly an instrument of gagging the press, (*Blueprint*, 2020; *Daily Independent*, 2020; *Daily Sun*, 2020; *Leadership*, 2020); *New Telegraph*, 2020; *ThisDay*, 2020 & *Vanguard*, 2020).

While focusing on the interface between the mass media, on one hand, and government, governance and politics, on the other, in Nigeria, this paper sought to examine the kind of dominant affinity between the mass media and politics. To achieve this, the paper adopted qualitative research method of exploring available secondary data in the area.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The paper, among other things, strived to achieve the following specific objectives:

1. To ascertain the nature of the relationship that exists between the mass media and the political class in Nigeria.
2. To identify the role of the mass media in building virile democratic culture capable of engendering an environment for good governance and development in Nigeria.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

These were the research questions applied to the study:

1. What is the nature of the relationship between the mass media and the political class in Nigeria?

2. What is the role of the Nigerian mass media in building virile democratic culture capable of engendering an environment for good governance and development?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Two theories were applied for the purpose of direction and focus of the paper. They are, social exchange and social responsibility theories.

Social exchange theory

The social exchange theory is a social psychology concept that concerns social changes as a process of interactive exchanges between different people and institutions. This theory is often used within the business world to explain and analyse relationship between people and people, institutions and institutions and how each of them benefit from the relationship. Propounded by the famous French anthropologist, Claude Lévi-Strauss in 1980s, social exchange theory proposes that individuals and institutions will make decisions based on certain outcomes. For example, they will expect most profit, rewards, positive results and long-term benefits. They will also prefer the exchange that leads to security, social approval and independence. In contrast, they will also choose alternatives that result in the fewest costs, consequences and least social disapproval. Therefore, every social exchange decision can be a complex decision that requires the person to evaluate different costs and rewards. The theory of social exchange is important to understand human and institutional interactions, just as they are obtainable in government and media relations.

The social exchange theory is relevant to this study as it enables pragmatic understanding of the nature of relationship that exists among institutions, in this case, the mass media and the Nigerian political system, whether it is one of benefit at the expense of the other or if it is reciprocal.

Social responsibility theory of the press

The social responsibility theory on the other hand is attributable to Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956), according to Middleton (2009), who notes that its relevance has remained since then. The underlying principle of the social responsibility theory of the press is that the press should be free to perform the functions which Libertarian theory granted them, but the freedom should be exercised with responsibility, (Okunna & Omenugha, 2012). If the media fail to fulfil their responsibilities to society, the social responsibility theory holds that the government should admonish the media to comply by way of controlling them. Bittner (1989, p. 76) notes that the social responsibility theory holds that the “press has the right to criticize government and institutions, but also has certain basic responsibilities to maintain the stability of society”. In furtherance of this notion, Dominick (2009) avers that:

This approach holds that the press has a right to criticize government and other institutions, but it also has a responsibility to preserve democracy by properly informing the public and by responding to society’s needs and interests. The press does not have the freedom to do as it pleases; it is obligated to respond to society’s requirements..., (Dominick, 2009, p. 213).

McQuail (2005, p. 170), on the other hand, cites the Hutchins’ Commission on Freedom of the Press and ascribes the press with additional responsibilities. The mass media should:

- Provide a truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of the day’s event in a context which gives them meaning.
- Serve as a forum for exchange of comment and criticism
- Project a representative picture of the constituent groups in society

- Be responsible for the presentation and clarification of the goals and values of the society.
- Provide full access to the day's intelligence.

The suitability of this theory to this study stems from its insistence on the provision of all necessary leverages by the government to the press to enable them serve the public optimally, though the later must reciprocate such gestures with utmost responsibility. But has this been the case in the Nigerian situation?

QUALITATIVE DATA

In this section, the qualitative data is presented with the view to further the debate on the relationship that exists between the mass media and politics in Nigeria. First an overview of the mass media and politics in Nigeria is presented

Mass Media and Politics in Nigeria: An Overview

The history of the mass media and politics in Nigeria is entwined (Aliede, 2003). Although the media in the country started as private organs, in no time it was dominated by political party/class ownership and therefore, geared to the advancement of political interests, party visions and missions. Earlier, on their inception during the colonial era, media ownership in Nigeria was dominated by missionaries, colonial administrators, nationalists, politicians, political parties and private foreign organizations. During the period, the press served as instruments for sustained public debate and political protests, an uncompromising advocate of administrative and political reforms, and a seething critic of the excesses of the colonial order, (Keghku, 2003). They were successful and unequivocally vocal, accomplishments that were to; in future, partly culminate in the ordeal the mass media were to later face.

Through their political activities, according to Omu (1968) and Duyile (1987), the pioneer press not only stimulated the emergence of nationalist movements, but also played prominent role in the constitutional development of modern Nigeria. During the period of nationalism, the press served as political recruiters and mobilizers. First, the party newspapers served as vehicles for changing political consciousness and through them the idea of nationalism was propagated and nurtured. Secondly, the press generally recruited people for political movements. Thirdly, they contributed to party organization. Fourthly, the press encouraged the penetration of political activities into the provinces and rural communities. Indeed, the press were among the major weapons used by the nationalist leadership to gain and consolidate political power and government control in the country.

The first known newspaper in Nigeria, *Iwe Irohin*, which was established in 1859, partly came to leverage on the political circumstances of the time, while the first radio/television station in Nigeria, WNTV came into existence as a reaction to political controversy between its owner, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the Premier of Western Region, on one hand and the Federal Government on the other.

The birth of the first generation of newspapers like *Iwe Irohin* and *Anglo African*, which was predicated on politics, consolidated and sustained largely on political gains they achieved for their masters. This apparently gave impetus to Nigerian nationalists and political gerrymanders to take up newspaper not only as a serious business, but much more as political weapon for wrestling power from Nigeria's British colonial masters. This, therefore, ushered in the second generation of newspapers in the coast of Nigeria. These newspapers included but not limited to *The Lagos Times*, *African Challenger*, *Lagos Observer* and *Lagos Echo*. There were a lot of political intrigues that led to their demise at different times. But before their departure,

they had set the stage for more vibrant and vitriolic mass media for the nation.

Another group known as independent newspapers championed the sustenance of Nigeria's political independence. They coerced and pressured military regimes and their jackboot temperaments in the country till they were trounced in the 1990s to enthrone the present democratic governance, thereby, bringing Nigeria into the same stream of leadership with the rest of the world. The enthronement of democracy as government of the people by the people for the people, thus brought with it greater responsibility for the mass media.

Today, the Nigerian mass media have grown in leaps and bounds. They are also stronger and better positioned to sustain politics. As well, they are diverse in their various industries: newspaper, magazine, radio, television and other adjuncts. Besides, the coming on board of the social media is no less a big boost and advantageous to the media landscape and to political development in Nigeria. Therefore, the mass media are of immense influence on Nigerian politics and political development, fact that has been practically evident before, during, after political independence, military era and since the emergence of the current democratic dispensation in 1999.

The Role of Mass Media in Democratic Growth

The mass media involve the entire system within which information is generated and transmitted for public education, enlightenment, socialisation and entertainment, (Aliede, 2003). They are also often interchangeable with the press. Taken together, the mass media and democracy are inextricably linked. Media for Democracy Monitor (2007) clearly understands this interface when it observes that modern democracy and the mass media are vital and indispensable link between those who govern and those who are governed.

It is in similar vein that Ugande (2010) and Auwal (2018) insist that if the mass media do not inform the citizens thoroughly and impartially about government policies and their consequences as well

as about alternatives of government policy proposed by opposition parties and civil society, the people's democratic choice is severely limited. Umaru & Abdullahi (2012) equally note that the mass media are very important and centrally located in the lives of the people and the democratic process.

They went further to establish that because of this centrality, the media justifiably focus their attention and accord high priority to government programmes. Lending credence to this, Ende (2013, p. 33) while citing Balkin (1998), argues that the mass media stimulate political transparency for "without the mass media", openness and accountability is impossible in contemporary democracies. He further contends that transparency would entail the assistance the mass media give to citizens to understand the operations of government; participate in political decisions and hold government accountable to the people. To McQuail (2005, p. 241), "Politics cannot do without the media, the...media would have to struggle without politics", underscoring the need for their symbiotic relationship.

Ojo (2015, p. 9) points out that the media and political system "are involved in an intricate nexus of relationship, cooperation and complimentary activities, all geared at promoting individual and collective interest of the society". He equally opines that in the performance of these roles, both estates exert considerable influence on one another. Not only do they exert considerable influence on each other, both the media and the political system work towards the same end in the society; ensuring good governance, providing a sense of direction and exercising control over the affairs of a state, protecting the rights of citizens and defending the rule of law.

Indeed, the press are, as well, catalytic instruments of conflict management, particularly in times of political imbroglio, (Clary, 2015). They recommend, initiate and participate in consultations, dialogues, diplomacy and discourses that assist to end such crises. Undeniably, the mass media perform variety of functions for

democracies growth and transformation. Sheila (2015) aptly sums up the role of media thus:

A fearless and effective watchdog is critical in fledgling democracies where institutions are weak and pummelled by political pressure. When legislatures, judiciaries and other oversight bodies are powerless against the mighty or are themselves corruptible, the media are often left as the only check against the abuse of power. This requires that they play a heroic role, exposing the excesses of presidents, prime ministers, legislators and magistrates despite the risks, (Sheila, 2015, p. 26).

Though Sheila (2015) only considered the oversight function of the media, there are other roles the press should play to ensure that the right government is enthroned. They educate and inform the voters to enable them make right choice of candidates for leadership positions. The mass media in politics portray parties and candidates, their antecedents and prospects for better for worst. Without reliable information, Katrin (2017) maintains, it would not be possible for the citizens to use their power effectively at election time, nor would they be aware of the problems and issues that need active consideration beyond voting. Since the media are the main source of information and a vital link between the government and citizens they are an indispensable precondition for both government accountability and social accountability. The media also provide forum where broad range of voices – opposition parties, civil society actors, independent experts and ordinary citizens can express alternative views, (ACSPN, 2018). All these ought to be sufficient grounds for mutual coexistence between the two: government and the mass media, in Nigeria.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on the other hand notes that addressing poverty requires not just the transfer of economic resources to the needy, but also making information available to the poor so that they can participate more meaningfully in

political and social life. The poor cannot assert their rights if they do not know what these rights are. If they are unaware of the laws and procedures for availing themselves of their entitlements or the mechanisms they can use to remedy their deprivations, they will always remain poor. Democracy cannot take root if the poor and powerless are kept out of the public sphere, UNESCO (1980). Sheila (2015) argues that the media are the key as they can provide the information poor people need to take part in public life.

The media provide voice to those marginalized because of poverty, gender, or ethnic or religious affiliation. By giving these groups a place in the media, their views – and their afflictions – become part of mainstream public debate and hopefully contribute to a social consensus that the injustices against them ought to be redressed. In this way, the media also contribute to the easing of social conflicts and to promoting reconciliation among divergent social groups, Sheila (2015, p. 28).

Abdur-Rahman (2013, p. 5) also itemises the role of the mass media in any democratic set up to include:

1. To convey information to the people with a view to letting them know how the mandate they gave their representatives is being discharged;
2. To provide a forum through which the governed could react to government policies and activities;
3. To assist in the articulation and pursuit of national interest;
4. To monitor the performance of government with a view to preventing their deviation from clearly stated objectives;
5. To assist in setting an agenda of priorities in the social, cultural, political and economic development of the nation;
6. To function as an agent of modernization; and
7. To provide informed criticisms on viable alternatives, among a host of others.

The media equally play key roles in regime change, Aliede and Ogodo (2018). Not only democratically. Their role in the Arab Spring that swept through Egypt, Tunisia, Sudan and Venezuela is obvious. The media are key to the dramatic and revolutionary events (mass demonstrations, clashes with police forces, vigils and boycotts) that culminate in the resignation of the autocratic leaders. Heavy international media coverage often triggers “demonstration effects” whereby citizens become aware of political changes elsewhere and emulate it in their own country, which further fuels mobilization against the existing authoritarian regime. Katrin (2017) notes that dictators (in the past) attempt to suppress mass upheavals by cutting off international communication links, a situation currently difficult with the prevalence of the social media.

Therefore, in all circumstances, the media are relevant in politics, governance and in the democratic process (play role in both giving the mandate and in what politicians do with the mandate), according to Uche (1999). This responsibility is bound to continue with the emergence of concept of civic or public journalism. The mass media are overcoming existing limitations like political barriers as faced in the past in reporting for mainstream media. Originated in the Unites States of America, (Dominick, 2009 and McQuail, 2005) public journalism fosters public dialogue and civic participation. By engaging more closely with the audience and with local communities, it distances itself from the symbiotic relationship with political elites and gives ordinary citizens public voice, chance to set agenda and be part of the democratic process. Thus, the mass media live up to their social responsibilities in line with the social responsibility theory of the press and accordingly meet the objectives of the study, especially in terms of contributing to the political development of the nation.

Thus, the mass media are key players in the consolidation of the Nigerian political process and development. But do these positive and functional roles translate to mutual coexistence between the mass media and the political class?

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The kind of relationship between the political class and the mass media in Nigeria is, undoubtedly, controversial as arguments on both sides of the issue are seemingly endless. Although a section of the commentators contend otherwise, available facts point to frosty relationship between the two, notwithstanding the efforts of the press to live up to their constitutional obligations and social responsibilities to the citizens and the country.

Those who insist on the prevalence of adversary coexistence would quickly point to the recent amendment of the Code of National Broadcasting Commission which imposed a fine of N5m on Nigeria Info FM station, Lagos, for allegedly airing fake news; an apparent lee way for politicians, having failed to pin down the press through a diabolic law against social media. Media practitioners and observes see the measure as draconian, punitive, sign of gagging the press and therefore, does not in any way portray cordial relationship between the two. This singular action, they believe, epitomizes the kind of regard and recognition the ruling class has for the Fourth Estate of the Realm; ironically, at a time the latter is assiduous in its duties to and expectations of Nigerians.

Incidentally, the only meaningfully argument from the other side is that the two parties have coexisted for so long, notwithstanding if the interface was cordial or unhealthy.

By providing avenues for public debate, information and education of the electorate, the media have been in the forefront for the enthronement of the best democratic principles, practices and good governance in Nigeria, (Moemeka, 2016 and Moemeka, 2000). Yet, it is regrettable that their diligence in these functions has not earned it reciprocal gesture of mutual relationship from the political class. This is equally evident in the uncomplimentary and unpleasant actions often taken by the ruling class against the smooth operations of the press. This is manifest, for instance, in the cruel legislations, brutality and extra judicial measures meted out to the press, most often using

security forces like the police. These intrigues directly conflict with the actions of the Nigerian media which always strive to fulfil their statutory obligation of letting the people know and having them informed so as to enable them take the right and appropriate political decisions, whether it is during elections or otherwise and irrespective of the government in power, (Aliede, 2013 and Aliede, 2011).

It is not surprising, thus, that many are of the view that it is not bed of roses between the government/politicians and the press in Nigeria, with the media at the receiving end, while the bashes now known to be historic, come from the government, ruling class and politicians, as Ukonu (2016), Nwosu (1999), Omu (1987) and Elias (1969) observe. Still, the press ignore these ordeals and forge ahead in order to live up to their social responsibilities (FMI, 1999). These tribulations date back to the colonial era when the governments used all sorts of mechanisms, including financial strangulation, pressure and open threats to cow down the press then seen as “excessively probing into public affairs”, (Aliede, 2003).

Such obstructive tendencies abound. They were most celebrated during the country’s dark days of military dictatorship of 1966 to 1999 and specifically during the Bahari (1983-1985), Babangida (1985-1993) and Abacha (1993-1998) juntas. The tyrants who ruled the country with iron fists flagrantly dished out decrees, especially against the press which was the only existing official agency opposed to their authoritarianism. Hence, in addition to the prevailing colonial press laws, security agencies were armed to brazenly intimidate, harass, beat up, maim, arrest and detain journalists without trial. Many scholars and analysts, among them, Arogundade (2014), Ende (2013), Onwosi (2013), Onwosi (2012), Udeze (2012), Sambe & Ikoni (2004) and Uche (1989) attest to the harassments, in which some practitioners lost their lives. A notable instance was Dele Giwa, the then Editor of the flagship newsmagazine, *Newswatch*, who was killed by a letter bomb on October 16, 1986. Many media practitioners either left the country for exile or went underground to practice what is now

known as guerrilla journalism. To save their lives, activists and politicians also ran away.

Besides, many media houses were arbitrarily fined, closed or proscribed. A glaring case was that of *The Guardian* newspaper in 1994. It was closed, fined, its two journalists imprisoned and its publisher, Alex Ibru, narrowly escaped death, though maimed through an assassination attempt. This scenario to a large extent redefined government-mass media relation in the country, according to Okoye (2009), Ogbondah (2003), Okoye (2003) and Egbon (2001). Yet, these torments did not abate even under civilian administration as is evident in series of moments of tension during Obasanjo's second era (1999-2007) and since 2015 of Buhari administration. Journalists are beaten up, detained, their houses and offices ransacked, operational gadgets seized or destroyed and now climaxed with repressive legislations aimed at instilling fears, quietening and crippling the press financially. Therefore, all the measures taken by the mass media with good intentions to partner with the government in contributing to the concretisation of the country's democratic processes are not only rebuffed, but also conversely and ironically revenged by the government and the ruling class.

CONCLUSION

The study attempted to ascertain the nature of the relationship between the political class/government and the mass media in Nigeria and also to identify the role of the mass media in building virile democracy in the country. Its qualitative method relied on the assessment of other works in similar area with a view to assessing their positions on the issue.

Available literature indicates that the media have promoted politics and good governance and as well fought to enthrone democratic rule in the country. This is in line with their social responsibilities and as well affirms one of our research questions. These the media did right from the inception of the premier newspaper

in the country, *Iwe Irohin*. By so doing, the press have contributed measurably to the nation's socio-economic and political development. In pursuit of this goal, the mass media in no small way aided the activities of the ruling class. However, regrettably, the gesture instead of been reciprocated, is punitively treated. Indeed, whether under military administration or civilian government, the mass media have had chequered history in their over 160 years of existence. In addition to prevailing harsh laws inimical to the congenial operation of the press, they government continually apply extra-judicial measures, through security agencies and politicians, which not only disrupt media operations, but also instil fears into media practitioners. The aftermath is rancorous co-existence between the two parties. This positively confirms the second research question.

Therefore, the relationship between the two has never been cordial. Somewhat, it had always been adversary, while the media had through resilience and doggedness tried to manage the situation so as not to jeopardise its duties to the people. In fact, the negative disposition of politicians never deterred the Fourth Estate of the Realm. They are rather emboldened as they soldier on in carrying out their statutory social responsibility by focusing on their services to the people in order to aid good governance and national development.

The pliability of the press, on the other hand, pays off. It yields such motivating factor like the further liberalisation of the polity following the institutionalisation of democracy in the country since 1999. Democratic governance bolstered freedom of expression and facilitated constitutional processes and development which stimulated fertile ground for smoother press operation. This is exemplified by Sections 22 and 39 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, as amended. Additionally, the tenacity of the Nigerian media forced the government to join other nations in enacting the Freedom of Information Act in 2011. Its provisions provide for public access to public records and information, paving the way for smoother and more effective operation of the press and robust service delivery to the

people. Thus, the efforts of the press are not in vain, notwithstanding its nasty predicament.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following observations made from the revelations of the review of the study, we make the following recommendations:

1. The role of political leaders, governments and the mass media are complementary and supplementary and geared to enhancing the wellbeing and welfare of the masses; hence they should work in synergy, cordially and cooperatively.
2. The political class should be more proactive in directing efforts towards the protection of the rights of the press, enhancing media accountability, building media capacity and democratising media accessibility. This will boost media vibrancy and aid their championing the cause of democracy and political developments in Nigeria.
3. The media should further be encouraged to crusade for deepened democratic culture by guaranteeing their independence, financial viability and freedom from political manipulation, vital conditions for conducive environment for media institutions to thrive.

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