

Globalization, democracy, and the news media in Nigeria: challenges and prospects

Adie Edward Ugbada

Department of theatre, film, and carnival studies, University of Calabar, Nigeria
e-mail: eddytorial@yahoo.com

Abstract

Democracy as a concept of government became universal after the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, the disbanding of the USSR in 1991, the crumple of communism and the end of the Cold War. Ever since then, this global phenomenon called democracy became the central and most preferred system of government worldwide. It has also been embraced in its entirety though in some cases modified based on the dominant/peculiar cultural and political structure of the people till this present day; except of course for a very few and negligible number of countries that have fervidly refused to embrace it as the best means of leading a people. This pervasive acceptance is predicated on two key elements- which are; globalization and the media. Though the concept of globalization is shrouded in strong arguments between a school of thought known as the skeptics and the other school of the argument known as the globalizers, McLuhan's Global Village postulation unraveled this controversy by a simple analogy which links the media as the vehicle with which the concept was made popular and acceptable to the clench of a large followership. In a symbiotic reward, the media was able to carry out its function of news dissemination in democracy, due to higher information technology occasioned by the consequences of globalization. Despite this advantage, the Nigeria democratic experience is one that has not been able to draw from the advantages herein. The country's democracy is been overwhelmed by different challenges that has affected its emergence since the country attained independence in 1960. However, happening in the 2015 general elections portend a ray of hope for the growth of democracy in the country after which it can then shift its efforts to the consolidation of its democracy.

Keywords:

Globalization; democracy; media; dissemination

1 INTRODUCTION

Throughout the globe, especially after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, the collapse of communism and the end of the Cold War, democracy became the dominant and most preferred system of government and has been embraced in its entirety though in some cases modified based on the dominant/peculiar cultural and political structure of the people till the present day; except of course for a very few and negligible number of countries that have vehemently refused to embrace the concept as the best means of leading a people. Countries like Russia and China even after the cold war have refused to come to grips with the concept of democracy. Apart from these two countries, in Europe and others in Asia have fully embraced democracy.

Democracy as practiced in contemporary times is predicated on the principles of liberty, equality and the rule of law (Tamanaha, 2004). Its success basks mainly in the doctrine of freedom in whatever form either freedom of expression, discussion of issues whether political or otherwise with all without fear of molestation or incarceration. A society is not free if, law-abiding citizens live in fear of being denied the right to work or deprived of life liberty and pursuit of happiness in a democracy; those who oppose the policies of the government loose no civil rights and those who support its policies acquire them by no civil rights either. In a democracy, minority opinions remain un-trampled as the majority opinion.

This goes to say that, the members of society exercise full rights to differ on issues under such rule in line with the existing global charter on human rights enshrined in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (article 1 and 19) which declares that; In line with the tenets of this declaration, a true democracy is that which has in its mainframe the freedom of political association, with right to differ on issues of national importance and the settlement of grievances by resulting to civilized systems either through counting of votes and accepting election results or seeking redress through legal jurisdiction, and all parties concerned yielding themselves to the tenets of the constitution to resolve disputes without resulting to force. A government by debate and discussion of the people and not a rule by arbitrary will and whim or dictate of an individual or a few individuals.

Likewise, Akande in Abraham (2016) describes democracy as, a political process that allows the plurality of political parties to ensure popular participation in political decision-making. One of the manifest components of democracy, which is, freedom of expression of the people in debates and discussions. Suffice to say that, there are three other essential requisites of democracy which are; a well-informed citizenry; participation of the citizens in the day-to-day governance of the society; and accountability to the citizens by those who exercise power on their behalf (Onabajo 2004:17 in Abraham, 2016). The recognition accorded the people in the description of democracy by Akande and several other scholars as will be seen later in this discussion does not just pencil down to the fact that elected leaders exercise power on behalf of the people as Onabajo suggest, but also because it is the people that participate in the process of election that usher this leaders to power.

This explains why election forms an important component in a democratic process. One of the basic features of democracy is the periodic conduct of elections. Election is viewed in several societies as, the most important and acceptable way of choosing people to the positions of leadership especially where there are fewer leadership positions with a larger number of people vying for such positions. It provides a positive platform on how leaders should be chosen in a democracy. Democracy and election are a time-tested concept that has gained popularity and spread to other countries and almost all the continents of the world because of the speed at which information travels due to an unprecedented advancement in information technology (IT) - a phenomenon that today is known as globalization.

Globalization has been the elixir behind the global incursion and expansion of democracy into new countries and climes, as well as its spread into supranational polities such as the European Union, the United Nations philosophical thrusts, and other Pro-Freedom Advocates. It confronts head on democracy's constantly changing nature; its diversity of institutions and practices; its repeated need to respond to exogenous challenges and, most importantly, its perpetually unsatisfactory quest to make 'real-existing democracy' conform better to 'potentially ideal democracy' (Kriesi, 2013).

All though many scholars still see globalization as a myth, its effects steers humankind glaringly in the eye. It drives institutions and shape their formation and transformation. Globalization describes the link between global activities. The issues of globalization are usually discussed around four different topics which Watkins (2009) terms; four distinct meanings of the term. The first according to Watkins (2009) is the neo-liberal moment; that commonplace economic globalization, full of itself and its right-wing rhetoric, which has brought economic crisis the world is now in and is, as a result, in manifest disrepute (Watkins, 2009). The second is Marshall McLuhan's global village phenomenon, which the world has become in the last two decades. It is the wired and wireless world of Information Technology (IT) that McLuhan foresaw with remarkable prescience. The third; the death pangs of the Eurocentric world: the rise of China and India and the desperate acts of the neo-cons and the fourth; the deep meaning of globalization (Watkins, 2009). Restriction of the format for this paper will not permit going into nitty gritty of this points. It is however worthy of mention that, all discussions of this phenomenon fall under the points explained above.

No matter the colorations emanating from scholarly perspectives, globalization explains world trends in terms of their interconnectedness; it explains the shrinking spaces into a single appreciable geographic common place bound by a set of rules by which participants commonly relate. Kaarbo and Ray (2010) reveals that globalization is a set of processes, rather than an end situation representing unrelenting erosion of all barriers to free trade, increasing worldwide economic integration.

On the political landscape, globalization has largely made possible advances in the entire management of democratic processes, particularly the Internet. As the world grows more connected, people in all nations achieve a far greater level of interdependence in activities such as trade, communications, information dissemination, travel, and political policy. Ekpu (2015) contends that globalization has changed the world in many ways we never thought of many years ago. The intrusive impact of technology and various media forms had severe impact on life style and have made the media landscape an important institution in the dissemination of news and by extension, for the proper functioning of democracy.

Through advanced information technology, the way the media disseminates information has taken a rocket form thereby granting it a bullet intensity and precision. In present day democracy, globalization has enhanced news broadcast either through, social media platforms, smart form messages or through customized message centers like Whazzup, BBL and other interactive platforms. Through bloggers news portals, social media users are constantly bombard with breaking or interactive news reports. The just concluded general election in Nigeria is a typical example of the capacity at which news can travel among users of the social media who are equally the electorates. Statistically it is quantified, as at January, 2014, by a cyber-outfit, Social Media Week Lagos, that, the number of Nigerian active Face book users were 11.2 million, and active net users were 55.9 million (Carter, 2014). The multiplier effects of this were tripled as at the election period, which explains the fear envisaged by some analyst during the election.

Supporting the above assertion Ebulefu (2015) relay that, as the country waited in bated breath for the outcome of the March 28, 2015 presidential election, part of the causes for apprehension and anxious moments that drove many crazy came liberally from the activities of Nigerian bloggers and Social Media users. Though some analysts see the proliferation of the social media patronage as a treat to news reportage, this trend has rather than serve as treats to the existing traditional media, strengthened its mass mediation capacity. Today, newspaper distributions both online and hard copy have a spread that is hundred (100) times had better than its initial value. Thus, strengthening the fundamental roles of the traditional news sources in democracy.

The achievements recorded through globalization have helped reinforce the view that the news media is a very important institution in the proper functioning of democracy. Lang and Lang (1959) submit that in democracy especially during elections, "the media force attention to certain issues. They build up images of political figures; they are constantly presenting objects, suggesting what individuals shall think about, know about, having feeling about." What this simply reveals is that, in a democracy particularly during elections media coverage helps project the various political activities lined up by the regulatory electoral agency including candidates vying for elective positions, to keep the electorates informed about the candidates; including the background history on them.

Invariably, the more the candidates are exposed to the rules of the processes and to people vying for elective positions, the more informed they would be able to make wise choices. This is because, when the people are well informed about the candidates and other aspects of the rules in an election period, they are very likely to behave in manners that will see to the smooth outcome of the elections. To this, Burns and Burns (1942) comment that, the success or failure of any electoral process is largely dependent on the role of the mass media. This explains why societies attach so much importance to the media.

Thus, in a democracy the media is required to raise the bar as it is expected to act in its capacity as agent of socialization. The media does this through certain functions that Norman (2013) captions; civic education and democratic animation. According Norman, civic education is imperative in any society. Through civic education, the media specifically can assume a continuous role in which citizens are enabled to understand, appreciate, and contribute to the effective workings of various political systems. As relayed by Norman, the learning process does not only concern general ideas about political systems but also, the best practices available. Norman concludes that, with the provision of a civic education, "the greater the likelihood that, citizens will use it to make very relevant choices within their situations."

In the final analysis, Norman, assert that, “democratic animation is an important part of the performance to the coverage of elections by the media. It refers to social engineering of the citizens through civic journalism. According to this scholar, some impact that democratic animation has on the citizens is that;

- It facilitates meaningful involvement and participation of the citizens in political life particularly in elections.
- It inculcates a sense of civic duty, civic pride, civic responsibility, and accountability in the citizens who are equally the electorates.
- It enables the electorates to exert pressure on their leaders to account for their actions and decisions.
- It creates self-confidence building aimed at citizens to actively demand and question policy decisions hence providing checks and balances for good governance.
- The Informed electorates are enabled to appreciate the performance and failures of those they periodically elect and thus exercise a ‘performance voting’ as opposed to ‘mobbing voting’, which seems to be more popular in most African countries.

In addition, Baker (2001) notes that, “democracy requires a free (media); a (media) to which it gives relatively specific assignment. A free and independent (media) can make important structural contributions that are as great as or greater than any constitutional and administrative devices”. What Baker probably suggest here is that; in as much as democratic rule rely on the constitution, the role of the media is equally if not even more desirous and may even play stronger parts, as it is the media that has the central-petal force that propels the processes in a democracy.

The media provides and equate background information about candidates to the audience. The media equally educates the people on their roles to ensure free and fair elections and at the same time ensure compliance to the rules by which the various stakeholders in the elections management process like, electoral umpires, monitoring teams, and other relevant institutions including the media outfits themselves are guided.

2 CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL CLARIFICATION

The definition of democracy is one that has always been shrouded in controversies amongst scholars over the years. Some scholars see democracy as a system of government where decisions are made based solely on consultations and representation; others see democracy as a concept, as a political system under which all or the most significant group in a population participate in a political process. They have access to effective representation in the process of making governmental decisions, which entails the allocation of resources. Supporting this views, Kabongo (1986) assert that, democracy transcends the mere rituals of periodic election to one that ensures the coexistence of plurality of opinions guaranteed by freedom of expression under the rule of the majority. This view of Kabongo (1986) which sees democracy as stated above may be narrow and short sighted as it tends to negate the essential elements or ingredients of the concept of democracy which is, the, ‘all-inclusiveness’ of individuals or members of society that characterize the concept as defined by other scholars. Democracy is all about the popular majority participating in the decision-making process on who leads and what policies are to be adopted in the governance of society. Democracy as a prerogative of the majority falls short of the required ingredients that support the concept.

It is strongly arguable that, democracy is not just a rule by a popular majority. Supporting this assertion, Bassey and Udoudom (2018) insist that; democracy cannot be the rule of the majority or the rule of the masses rather; a way of governing weather by majority or otherwise; primarily for determining who shall govern, and broadly to what end. Egbon (2001: 9) on this strength argues that the Greeks practice of democratic rule occurred at a period in history when there was neither representation nor party systems in the governance of society; thus, the concept lacks the structure of ascribing such cliché ‘popular majority’ often ascribed in the definition of democracy by some scholars.

As a result, any attempt in defining democracy must see it as a system of government where all citizens of a country have equal rights to represent and be represented. Such definition must see democracy as an all-inclusive government where policies are determined by public opinion, and sometimes by representation. It is only the definition that considers these elements that may have presented democracy in its modern form compared to the Grecian ancient notion and style of democracy where representation is absent. Cardinal to the concept of the present form of democracy is that, all members have equal right to participate in the political decision of the society. This consideration perhaps underscores the wide acceptance of Abraham Lincoln’s definition between (1809 and 1865) which sees democracy as, government of the people for the people and by the people (Schwartz, 2005).

As simple as Lincolns definition may seem, it speaks volumes-it explains in clear terms, the involvement of the people in making a choice on who should govern them, among several contestants vying for an elective position. It is thus worthy of note that, election form an integral part of a democratic process. It is worthy to mention that, democracy, elections and the people who are the recipients of its dividends may not have been a successful venture without the support of key institutional elements like globalization and the media.

The concept of Globalization is one phenomenon that has been keenly argued by scholars of different discipline. The arguments involved in its structure, features and functionality has constantly polarized scholars along schools of thought. Prominent among the arguments is, two schools of thoughts the first one which says, globalization is a myth-the skeptics, and the second group the globalizers as Panday (2009) uphold the veracity of the concept .Between the two schools of thoughts, globalization is insisted with a myth. Globalization is just a coinage adopted just to see the world with one eye. According to them, it is the apatite of the privileged. They state further that, it is the supreme myth of all that people invested their hopes and dreams in the expectation that the world would come together that have never been. A point of view that these scholars held to accounts since Panda (2009, 37) refer to them as skeptics.

Globalization is considered as a central driving force social, political that are behind the rapid growth reshaping modern societies and world order (Castells, 2000; Rantanen, 2005). These two arguments may be valid in their own rights depending on which side or perspective of the divide it is looked from. For instance, scholars of media studies would

want to identify with the later argument of Giddens and Castells which considered globalization to be the driving force social, political, that are behind the rapid growth reshaping modern societies and world order because it conforms to the 'Global village' theory.

The global village theory sees the media as the medium through which the idea of globalization as a concept has been disseminated to the world. This submission clearly shows the link between the arguments of the skeptics who see globalization as the hope people have that the world would come together and that of the globalizers who reasoned that globalization is the only explanations for evident rapid growth that was reshaping Modern societies. There is no doubt that, the media accounts for the missing link and as such can no longer be discarded as a myth. In other words, through advancement in information technology, news is easily disseminated to the utmost crannies of the earth and as such makes the media a very useful and indispensable institution in the proper functioning of democracy.

3 CHALLENGES IN NIGERIA'S DEMOCRATIC EXPERIENCE SINCE INDEPENDENCE

The two elections were adjudged to be marred with irregularities. As in the first attempt, Osoba (2007) affirm that majority of the eligible voters were disenfranchised, while in the second attempt, voting was restricted to only Lagos and Calabar, and as such cannot be accepted as a representation of the people's choice. Achebe (1983) reveal that, the two previous attempts at conducting elections under civilian rule generated crisis, which culminated into the collapse of the two republics due to several electoral frauds some of which allegedly were aided and abetted by the media.

Within the aforementioned periods, the populace encountered great hardship as; they were subjected to arbitrary rules perpetrated by a military autocracy. In the entire 39 years (1960-1999) out of the 55 (1960-2015) years of its independence, the people were exposed to stringent measures that negate their rights as free citizens and denied them the opportunity to choose freely. Instead, coercion, subjugation, and force were adopted as means of enforcing policies while decrees were used as legal frame for prosecution. These periods witnessed the removal of freedoms of expression, association, procession in groups and other forms thus leading to distrust by the governed against the mechanisms of governance and their governors. The voice of the media was grossly muscled with obnoxious decrees. The general feeling of animosity, fear and lack of believe in government policies were very evident.

As a result of the above characteristics of military autocracy therefore, when democracy became entrenched fully in 1999, though it was embraced with great enthusiasm by the people, none the less it became very difficult for the democratically elected government to enforce policy changes that will better serve society and further entrench true democracy. Under the new dispensation, efforts at policy changes often met stiff opposition, while others no matter how well intentioned were sternly resisted. The means of communicating policy change by the government were seen to be crude. When the people were taken into consideration in planning, the government results to outdated policies of ancient misrule.

The resultant effects of this is a gradual breakdown of law and order and destruction of democratic processes as well as the rise of different infra groups like, The Odu dua' People's Congress (OPC), Afenifere, the Movements for the Emancipation of the Ogoni Communities, the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign States of Biafra (MASSOB) and most recently, the rise of the terror group, Boko Haram, all clamoring for special attention (Aghedo & Osumah, 2012). Likewise, the struggle for power increased; states mounted pressure on the central power through infra groups for recognition. The incumbent ruling political parties and their elected leaders held on to power at all cost, using both machinery of government to overpower their political opponents. Electoral clientelism and vote buying which are widely perceived as the political class evidently practices major obstacles to economic development during elections.

Also, during elections, there were evident general disobedience for the electoral act by both the electoral umpire, the political party members, the politicians vying for available seats and even some of the electorates who are used in scuttling the electoral processes and election proper sometimes. Ballot snatching, ballot box stuffing, distortion of figures, and senseless assassination and complete disrespect for the constitution all featured prominently during elections till this present time. The constitution and the judiciary (lawyers) staff who are supposed to interpret it all have their flaws. While the selection of the tribunal panelist is often lopsidedly done by the Judiciary hierarchy

In addition, ethnocentrism were not spared in the power play. Rather than taking up a central campaign for change, preference and sympathy developed in defense of fellow tribes' men even when such tribesmen are corrupt, incompetent and not feat to rule. So strong, were these biases that, it threatened the peace of the country and portend danger for democracy. What may come to mind at this point is where was the power of the media to correlate all the segment of society. Unfortunately, they too were caught up in this tales of wows. The Nigeria news media landscape was always known to be polarized along ethnic lines. The news media has been like that since the country's chequered democratic history until this day. This posture confirms the postulation of Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (Nordenstreng, 2006) which says that, "the press always takes on the form and coloration of the social and political structure within which it operates."

4 THE NIGERIAN MEDIA PERFORMANCE IN DEMOCRACY

That Nigeria has had a chequered democratic journey thus far is no longer in contention. Since the country-embraced democracy in 1999, its effort at democratization, which is a process of evolving from an authoritarian to a democratic system, has always been fraught with irregularities. In other words, this worldwide phenomenon called democracy has almost been a mirage in Nigeria despite its efforts at entrenching democracy. A general assessment of news media performance in Nigeria reveals that, before independence, the press was known to be vibrant and nationalistic in their news reportage. They were known to be objective and non-partisan. Ajibade (1900) affirm that "the growth and

development of the press saw the newspapers expressing strong nationalist sentiments characterized by, pungent criticism of British colonial policies” The press was known to fight vehemently against colonial rule. The press played an important role in ending colonial rule and it was thus recognized as a social force for liberation (Sambe, 2010).

However, at the turn of a new dawn, the press is seen to shift their focus from their dogged arbitrariness with which they fought colonial rule to a standstill and became partisan. Uche (1989) reveals that, “When Nigeria attained independence in 1960, the mass media orientation shifted towards tribal and sectional loyalties in preference to the goal of national unity, identity, and integration. Abayomi (2003) on his part reveals that, the press got enmeshed in ethnic politics within the overall affairs of the nation and this added ethnic posture... made it to lose focus as a watch-dog.” The news media in Nigeria seem to maintain this posture long after independence and deep into democratic dispensation until this day as, available scholarly literatures suggest. The news media in Nigeria has been seen to have embraced partisan bias since 1965. Orhewere (2003) argues that, “the Nigerian media has not shown enough commitment to professional ethics thereby contributing to electoral crises in Western Nigeria in 1965 and subsequent elections. Apart from Orhewere, other scholars (Achebe, 1983; Coleman, 1958), all have accused the news media of partisan bias in their coverage of elections.

REFERENCES

- Abayomi, S. (2003). Government-media relationship from 1960-2000. *Issues in Nigerian Media History: 1900-2000 AD*, 105–119.
- Abraham, O. J. (2016). Democracy, Globalization and the News Media in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects. *A Journal of Theatre & Media Studies*, 1(2).
- Achebe, C. (1983). The problem with Nigeria. *Enugu: Forth Dimension Publishers*.
- Aghedo, I., & Osumah, O. (2012). The Boko Haram uprising: how should Nigeria respond? *Third World Quarterly*, 33(5), 853–869.
- Ajibade, O. (1900). Contributions of Religious Publications to the Development of Nigerian Journalism: Past, Present and Future. *Issues in Nigerian Mass Media History*, 2000.
- Baker, C. E. (2001). *Media, Markets, and Democracy*. Cambridge University Press. Retrieved from <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=bCYvXzjh2uoC>
- Bassey, S. A., & Udoudom, M. D. (2018). Developmental Democracy in Africa: A Review.
- Burns, A. C., & Burns, A. (1942). *History of Nigeria*. G. Allen and Unwin Limited. Retrieved from <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=BoE4B1gwMVgC>
- Carter, M. (2014). How Twitter may have helped Nigeria contain Ebola. *BMJ: British Medical Journal (Online)*, 349.
- Castells, M. (2000). Information technology and global capitalism. *On the Edge: Living with Global Capitalism*, 52–74.
- Coleman, J. S. (1958). *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*. University of California Press. Retrieved from <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=DxVzAAAAMAAJ>
- Ebulefu, T. (2015, April 5). The social media war that made the presidential election tick. *The Guardian*.
- Ekpu, R. (2015, December 21). Feminine capital, masculine interest. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://guardian.ng/opinion/feminine-capital-masculine-interest/>
- Kaarbo, J., & Ray, J. (2010). *Global politics*. Cengage Learning.
- Kabongo, I. (1986). Democracy in Africa: hopes and prospects. *Democracy and Pluralism in Africa*, 35–39.
- Kriesi, H. (2013). Conclusion: An assessment of the state of democracy given the challenges of globalization and mediatization. In *Democracy in the Age of Globalization and Mediatization* (pp. 202–215). Springer.
- Lang, K., & Lang, G. E. (1959). The mass media and voting. Glencoe. Free Press.
- Nordenstreng, K. (2006). ‘Four Theories of the Press’ reconsidered. *Researching Media, Democracy and Participation*, 35.
- Norman, A. S. K. (2013). Comparative analysis between the proportional and single member electoral systems. *International Journal of Physical and Social Sciences*, 3(4), 245.
- Orhewere, J. (2003). Mass media professionalism in the coverage of election in Nigeria. *Polimedia*.
- Osoba, O. (2007). Banes of Good Electoral Conduct. *The 4th Trust Annual Dialogue. Free and Fair Election Getting It Right*. Abuja: Media Trust.
- Panday, P. K. (2009). Does globalization affect media role in a democratic country? Bangladesh perspective. *Journal Media and Communication Studies*, 1(2), 33–42.
- Rantanen, T. (2005). *The Media and Globalization*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446221198>
- Sambe, A. S. (2010). *Press Freedom: A Comparative Analysis of Nigeria and Ghana (1996-2007)*. Benue State University.
- Schwartz, B. (2005). The new Gettysburg Address: fusing history and memory. *Poetics*, 33(1), 63–79. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2005.01.003>
- Tamanaha, B. Z. (2004). *On the rule of law: History, politics, theory*. Cambridge University Press.
- Uche, L. U. (1989). *Mass media, people, and politics in Nigeria*. Concept Publishing Company.
- Watkins, M. (2009). Four Faces of Globalization. *Peace Magazine*. Retrieved from <http://peacemagazine.org/archive/v25n2p18.htm>