

A need for one voice



Nigeria has undergone much political and religious change. As a result, the impact of the media under the new management is unknowable without extensive research. In the course of this paper, we will examine these constructs as well as those historical events which inform the current media, political, and personal relationships of the people of Nigeria. For our purposes, the examination of media involvement in the political and personal spheres will begin with 2003, because the elections of 2004 were followed closely by allegations of corruption for many of the newly-elected government officials (Newswatch 2007).

It is just as unclear to what extent- if any- the media was responsible for these allegations and whether or not they are true. With that in mind, this paper sets out to examine the following questions: How deeply were the elections of 2007 influenced by the media? Does- and if so, how does- the media affect the Nigerian political process today?

Introduction

Your average American knows anywhere from little to nothing about Nigeria. If they did, it would read like some Gothamite vision set in a wild and impoverished land. Nigeria is trying to fight its way out from under segregation, racism, and poverty.

With all of the problems, it may be easy to forget that Nigeria is a crucial contributor to the mystique of Africa, but the country is trying to break free of its past. One glimmer of hope shines forth from the elections there, but how deeply were the elections of 2007 influenced by the media? Does- and if so, how does- the media affect the Nigerian political process today?

Justification

If Nigeria has been so afflicted and conflicted, then it is hard to believe that the technologically-advanced countries have not heard more about it. It is a simple matter; media perceptions are an easy disguise for personal opinions and governmental propaganda.

This is evident in the example of the hush-hush Ugandan genocidal dictatorship of Amin. The conflict is so much a part of African countries that the research community tends to turn a deaf ear to what has become an old refrain, the white noise of “ Africa has problems”. Like much of Africa, Nigeria is another country torn between Muslims, Islam, and other emerging religious groups. The apartheid had a great impact on racial relations as well. In summation, there is a great deal of research to be done that cannot be achieved through research in mainstream resources.

The public eye has been directed toward the Middle East now- where Europe and then Russia were before it. To hear more than a passing comment about Africa- much less Nigeria in particular- is rare.

Existing Literature

There is a tug of war between the Islamic and Muslim religions, politics, and the media, whose precarious position as mediator and interpreter commands respect and fear. After allegations that Nigeria’s own Jaafar Adam was involved in the funding of terrorist operations abroad, Adam had dismissed the allegations as “ American and Western propaganda against Islam and Muslims” (Suleiman 2007: 29).

Just two months later he was gunned down in what appeared to be a brutal public statement concerning his frank statements about the state of religious

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and public affairs in Nigeria. Adam himself was a member of one of the stricter sects of Islam and had fallen out with the fellow-Islam governor, Shekarau, over policies proposed to integrate selected religious principles into the political arena, and Adam became an outspoken critic of actions taken by Shekarau after that point (Suleiman 2007). Adam had been promised time to speak publicly about the 2007 election. He was not allowed to do so.

In Nigeria, being an outspoken man of principle is likely to get you killed either by opposing religious groups or estranged friends. Ironically, in this particular case, despite the very public accusations that he had ties to terrorist extremists, the police theorized that “ Adam was killed by Muslim extremists who hated his attacks on their activities” (Suleiman 2007: 30). In the week that Adam died eight Islamic extremists were also arrested for brutal murders (Suleiman 2007). One Nigerian citizen described the election as “ a do-or-die affair” and voiced objections to the lowering standards for governmental appointments (Randall, 2007: 73).

In January of 2007 Ghana’s newspaper, The Statesman reported that several high-ranking Nigerian officials were questioned before the election regarding doubts of the legitimacy of their qualifications (2007). The March edition of Nigeria’s Newswatch features a gargantuan headline: “ Clouds Over April Polls”. Underneath this bold title is the picture of the Nigerian Vice President known as Atiku and an election hopeful, Buhari, in a tabloid layout depicting the conflict as a cat-fight (Newswatch 2007).

However, on paper at least, both Atiku and Buhari expressed admiration for the demonstration of Nigerian democracy at work and a relief at the

passivity of the public response to the accusations (The Statesman 2007). In any case, the winner of the crucial election would find himself “ walking in a minefield” (Newswatch 2007: 26). (The statement “ I can’t win for losing” comes to mind.) Although the exact number is not clear, approximately twelve of the previous elections’ officials were quietly replaced after facing allegations of corruption in 2003 (Newswatch 2007).

Methodology

Because, as we have discussed, the number and reliability of publicly-released statistics are few and far between, an objective evaluation from a quantitative standpoint is not a valid “ distance” research proposal at this time. For the purposes of our examination of the Nigerian media’s impact upon the 2007 elections, we will use a qualitative critical discourse analysis. Because of the limitations that are informally enforced upon public statements, a recommended course of action (to follow the preliminary research) is to establish telecommunication contact with the credible public, media, and higher education officials living in Nigeria.

This will be particularly useful to the understanding of the insider’s perspective on Nigeria and will act as a control within the qualitative research. The primary focuses of the research will center only on the background reports and case studies from 2003 or later, the study of the newspaper reports, case studies, and personal narrative literature which are deemed credible, and the literature involving current events, the media, and the upcoming elections. Another suggested source to locate would be one of the many video films or home videos of everyday life and politics in Nigeria.

This method of recording the facts of a Nigerian life has become a force to be reckoned with and should not be difficult to locate for a small sum, particularly because the videographers who have popularized this documentary-like art and media form very seldom get paid more than pennies on the dollar for their completed works (Ogunleye 2007). It should be noted that verification of the authenticity of the video films is necessary to avoid inaccuracies that may accompany the artistic and technical nature of this media form.

The study of the efficacy of peace and conflict journalism within Nigeria could answer for the value of the overall purpose of the research because Wolfsfeld claims that emerging research presents perspectives that suggest that the media makes or breaks conflict within a country and creates “a culture of peace”. (as cited by Ogunleye 2007: 4). Expected Outcomes I expect to find a distinct and mutual correlation between the Nigerian election of 2007 and the media.

I further expect to find that the influence of the media had a broad effect immediately prior to that election and a continuing effect upon Nigerian politics that warrants further examination by the research community.

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