

# The Role of Mass Media In Security Challenges In Nigeria's Fourth Republic

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**ABSTRACT:** *The role of the media can never be overlooked in any political system. The role is more compounded in a conflict situation when the media must provide information on the crisis. The paper looked into the various roles of the media in a system that is dominated by security challenges. The use of content analysis of secondary sources from published books, journals, official documents, newspapers and magazines was employed in this work. The paper makes a conceptual clarification of the concepts of mass media and security. The paper discussed security situation in Nigeria and the role being played by the media. The paper concludes that irrespective of the security threat to the lives of the media practitioners, the media must perform its duties without fear or favour. The paper finally makes some recommendations which include freedom of the press must be guaranteed to avoid intimidation, security personnel should work with the media to protect them against security risk, the media should guide against publishing stories that can heat up the polity and the freedom of information act should be utilized.*

**Key Words:** *Mass media, Security, Nation, Insecurity, Government.*

## Introduction

One contemporary and recurring challenge facing the Nigerian state is the problem of insecurity which has pervaded almost all parts of the nation. The menace of insecurity is becoming outrageous and devoid of feasible, notable and lasting solution in the current dispensation. Nigerian citizens now sleep with one eye open as a result of insecurity facing the nation. While the spate of insecurity continues, the involvement of certain agencies of government like the police, the army, state security services (SSS) is noticeable. Apart from these agencies and insecurity outfits, the mass media is an important institution that is imperative in the moves to reposition the nation's security system and restoration of peace at all levels.

In any political system, the issue of security is paramount. It is on this note that Ajayi (2015) submits that a major responsibility of modern states is providing security for the lives and properties of the citizens...and the increasing complexity of the contemporary security challenges and the large quantum of information required to be able to confront them have made information gathering for intelligence and counter-intelligence to be liberalized and taken away from the exclusive responsibility of the formalized state architectures. Be that as it may, the role of the media on the issue of security can never be over-emphasized.

This paper therefore looks at the role of mass media in the security challenges in Nigeria.

## Statement of the Problem

Over the years, the mass media has been deeply involved in the crave for adequate security in Nigeria but the level of their involvement has been hampered by certain environmental forces. Such forces are discernible in the areas of unnecessary tortures of journalists, confiscation of their equipment, seizure of copies of printed material for circulation, incessant killings of journalists covering crisis and insecurity situations. Whereas, the duty of the press is to monitor and disclose areas of security challenges in a nation, the freedom to do that is lacking as a result of the above.

Coupled with the above problem is the introduction of bias by media practitioners to their reportage which has brought them in collision with the authority. Journalists therefore discharge their duties with sentiments as a result of their strong attachment to ethnic and religious affinity.

## Methodology

This work relies on descriptive method of research. Information is therefore sourced from books, journals, periodicals, newspapers, magazines, government publications and other sources.

## Conceptual Clarification

### Mass Media

Mass media refers to the means of communicating to the large, heterogeneous and widely dispersed people. Through this medium, information is transmitted from one source to the other. As Martins and Alan (1990) put it, "mass media refers to all forms of communication by which opinions, ideas, information,

knowledge and entertainment are transmitted to large number of people at the same time”

To Lansner (2006), mass media is described as “the fourth realm of the estate that serves as a watchdog and exercise external vigilance over societal actors to serve as a counterweight to powerful interest”. This is a reflection of the fact that mass media helps to checkmate the activities of powerful interest in the political system and makes known the various activities of government to the public, apart from these, the operation of civil society organizations are made to see the light of the day by the mass media.

On this note, Oche (2006), assert that whether for good or for bad, the activities of civil societies organization in post transition Nigerian would have had a lesser impact in terms of public cognizance had it not been for the mass (especially the print) media.

The media is an important aspect of any political system. It is a means through which the activities and policies of government are made known to the citizens and also a channel through which people opinions are brought to the attention of the government. The media, thus serve as a link between the government and the governed.

### **Security**

Security is described as “stability and continuity of livelihood (stable and steady income), predictability of daily life (knowing what to expect), protection from crime (feeling safe), and freedom from psychological harm” (Achumba, Ighomereho and Akpor-Robaro, 2013). Security deals with creating a peaceful, compassionate and orderly atmosphere that guarantees citizens access to their basic needs and freedom without fear.

As Akin (2008) submitted, security refers to a “situation that exists as a result of the establishment of measures for the protection of persons, information and properties against hostile persons, influences an action”. Ali (2013) looks at security from the angle of government providing protection for the citizens through the machineries of the government. According to him, security “includes the means at the disposal of the government for the protecting the state and its citizens from external and internal insurrection”. Lippman (1943) submits that “a nation is secured to the extent to which it is not in danger or having to sacrifices societal core values”.

From the above, security is of utmost importance in a nation. With adequate security, the growth and the development of the system are guaranteed. When security of lives and properties becomes the hallmark of a nation, nothing stands as a clog to wheel of the progress of the nation.

### **Areas of Security Challenges in Nigeria**

The attainment of national growth and development hinges on the level of security provided by the government of a nation. This is germane since all other sectors of the political system rest on adequate security and peace. Given the prevalence of violence and chaos pervading the political and economic atmosphere of the nation, it is evident that national peace and security have been put under serious threat. Lives of citizens, their properties and nation's infrastructures have become major target of this menace. This section analyzes some areas of security challenges in Nigeria:

#### **(i) Boko Haram Insurgency**

The Boko Haram insurgency which started in 2009 has become the greatest security challenges in Nigeria. Though the Islamic group operates majorly in Northern part of Nigeria, its impacts are felt by all and sundry since citizen from all parts of Nigeria resides in the North. Boko Haram as interpreted means ‘Western education is prohibited’ and the full name of the Islamic group is “Jama’atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda’awati wal-jihad” which is interpreted as “people committed to the propagation of the Prophet’s teachings and Jihad”

National peace and security has been tampered with by the activities of the Boko Haram. The group has committed many atrocities which has claimed many lives including women and children, Nigerian youths most especially those under the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) were not spared of these nefarious activities as some were killed while on national assignment and have their dead bodies sent to their parents. The most affected represents the religious organization especially the church which has become the major focus of attack by the Islamic fundamentalist.

The Madala bomb blast in December 2011 on a group of worshippers in a church recorded massive loss of lives of many Christian worshippers. The suicide bombers also hits the winner chapel in Yelwa, Bauchi State and twelve (12) people were killed in the process and scores of the others were injured. Three other churches were attacked in Plateau and Borno killing not less than 10 people and injured a lot (Tell, 2012).

The Christ the King Catholic Church, Sabon Gari and the evangelical Church winning all (ECWA) in Wusasa, Zaria were not spared while the Shalom Pentecostal church in Triyaniya, Kaduna was also attacked by the Boko Haram sect. Attack on churches became a weekly occurrence and the list becomes endless. Attacks by Boko Haram are not limited to religious establishment alone. Government institution faces hectic moments. The Police Headquarters in Abuja recorded a bomb blast in June 2011 in which the Islamic sects claimed responsibilities. The United Nations building in Abuja came under attack in August 2011 (Achumba, Ighomereho and Akpor-Oboro, 2013).

Bello (2012) noted that "aside from Boko Haram's bombing of the UN headquarters in 2011 and the groups alleged involvement in the kidnap and subsequent killing of a British and an Italian national in March 2012, almost all of his targets have been local" and "the threat by terrorist group Boko Haram is fuelling concern about Nigeria stability and risk to regional security". Boko Haram is considered a potential threat to the democratic experiences and overall development of Nigeria.

The destruction of telecommunication gadgets and equipment has also formed parts of the destructive pattern of Boko Haram. The sects claimed to be masterminds of destruction of masts of certain services provider like MTN and AIRTEL.

## **(ii). Militancy in Niger Delta**

The Niger Delta represents the area that produced the most lucrative minerals resources in Nigeria. The area is noted for abundant oil resources which has become the mainstay of Nigeria foreign earning.

Availability of oil resources in the Niger Delta has indeed translated to the development of the nation as seen in the provision of infrastructures in many parts of Nigeria. Be that as it may, the Niger Delta has witnessed recurring violence and has become a crisis ridden area with attendant destruction of lives and properties. The area also witnessed kidnapping and hostages of indigenes and foreign nationals. The situation became critical and remained a major issue of concern to the Nigerian government and the entire public. Akinwale (2009) laments that:

"the contexts of the Niger Delta struggles is defined by the Nigeria national question with grave implication for conflicts. The dimensions of conflicts in the Niger Delta includes conflicts between the multinational oil companies, the Nigerian states and the host communities, as well as intra and inter communal conflicts. The complexities of these conflict stems from contradictions in the exploitative production systems and the hostile exchange relation between the two major coalition, comprising the multinational oil companies and the Nigerian states on the one hand and the youths and peasants communities on the other hand".

The struggle within the Niger Delta area stems from agitation for a fair share of the resources realized from their land and using the resources to develop the area. The agitation becomes escalated between the various communities and oil companies around the region. Nigeria had by 1980's become almost completely economically dependent on petroleum extraction, which at the time generated 25% of its GDP. This has since increased to 60% as of 2002. Despite the vast wealth created by petroleum, the benefits have been slow to trickle down to majority of the population (www.wikipedia).

The eruption of militant groups in Niger Delta has indeed promoted conflicts and security challenges to the nation. We have the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), Niger Delta Militant, Niger Delta Avengers, and Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) and the likes.

These groups have claimed responsibilities for attacks on individuals, oil companies, foreign nationals and pipeline through their operations in the creeks.

The Reformed Niger Delta Agenda (RNDA) which represents a coalition of militants recently threatens to resume attacks on oil facilities if the federal government refuses to resume negotiation with the leadership of the region on the development of the region (Daily Post, 2017).

## **(iii). Kidnapping and Ritual Killings**

Kidnapping and ritual killings has assumed a greater dimension in Nigeria. Kidnapping is the act of abducting people and holding them captive. In Nigeria, kidnapping is no longer an act but a profession. The menace of kidnapping ravages the whole parts of Nigeria unlike Boko Haram and Militancy that are peculiar to certain parts of the country. Kidnapping and ritual killings takes place in all parts of Nigeria.

The Premium Times in its archives on kidnapping reported the following; Activist blames police inaction for rising kidnapping cases in Ekiti (May 18, 2015), Prison Escapee, others nabbed in Ekiti for kidnapping 75-year-old woman (July 14, 2015), Mother of Ex-Governor Sylva's Running Mate regains freedom from kidnappers (November 10, 2015), kidnappers Abduct Ondo Governorship Aspirants, Demands N 20 Million (January 11, 2016), Police Arrest ten (10) for kidnapping, Armed Robbery in Akwa Ibom (January 30, 2016), Ex-President Jonathan's uncle kidnapped (February 17, 2016), Mother of Rivers

commissioner freed by kidnappers, (February 19, 2016), How government stormed, abducted our student-Lagos School Principal (March 2, 2016), Kidnapped Kogi judge released (June 15, 2016) Special Courts coming for kidnapping –Sogcy (June 24, 2016) Police Arrest three(3) kidnappers in Kogi (July 15, 2016), Kaduna requires special security outfits against kidnapping (July 28, 2016), Police nabbed two(2) vigilante for allege kidnapping in Enugu (February 16, 2017), Bauchi Approves Death sentence for kidnapping (March 7, 2017), with guilty plea, Billionaire kidnappers Evans, faces life imprisonment (August 30, 2017).

#### **iv. Fulani Herdsmen Attacks and Killings**

Of recent, attack and killing by Fulani herdsmen have become a serious issues on our security system in Nigeria. The menace of herdsmen's attacks and killing surfaced in Nigeria at a time the nation is coming out of security threat by Boko Haram. While Boko Haram carries out its activities in the northern part of the Nigeria, Fulani herdsmen attacks happens and has been extended to nearly all parts of Nigeria.

Cases of clashes between Fulani herdsmen and farmers have been reported with the later claiming and holding herdsmen responsible for the destruction of their farm products.

It was reported that not less than 2000 people have been killed in Benue state with properties valued in billions of naira destroyed by marauding Fulani herdsmen between 2013 and the early part of 2018 (The Nation, 2018).

In a similar vein, rampaging Fulani herdsmen attacked and razed down two densely populated settlements-Suwa and Buruku-in Lamurle local government area of Adamawa state. The attacks were carried out by well-armed Fulani herdsmen who struck and continued to wreck havoc leaving the communities in rubbles (www.premiumtimes.com, 2018).

In another report, at least seven persons were reportedly shot at by gunmen suspected to be herdsmen along the Unenurhie community axis of the East-West road of Delta State (www.vanguardngr.com).

Also, Fulani herdsmen stabbed a man to death in Ondo state when the victim was allegedly stabbed to death by a Fulani man who wanted to board a vehicle at a motor park at the Road Block area of Akure after a disagreement between them (www.informationng.com).

#### **Media and Security Challenges in Nigeria**

The media can be crucial in shaping public opinion about conflict even in the most established democracies, independent media demonstrate chauvinistic and jingoistic tendencies in wartime and during internal strife, the media can serve to dampen or fan incendiary situation (Lansner, 2006).

The mass media represents the fourth estate of the realm that performs the role of watchdog on the activities of government through effective reportage and dissemination of information between the government and the governed.

It is imperative to know that "secrecy gives those in government exclusive control over certain areas of knowledge and thereby increases their power. It is thus not surprising that the issues of secrecy in matters of public affairs have long been a source of public concern" (Stiglitz, 2002).

Public affairs and most importantly issues that border on security have indeed become a major source of public concern in Nigeria. The rate and speed at which killings and counter-killings pervades the political system is worrisome to the entire citizens.

The media is a key player in the area of security and publicity is a major check against insecurity in a nation. The function of the media is to make public the various occurrences and alert the people on the area that constitute security threat to the system. The media performs this function through objectivity in their reportage. In his submission, Okoye(2002) explains that "objectivity demands that the journalist keep himself out of report by not injecting his emotions, personal opinions and bias into the news report". Neutrality in journalism brings out the beauty of the report and results in a good sense of judgment by the public.

The primary criterion of a story newsworthiness is usually in audience appeal, wish is judged by its potential impact on readers or listeners, its degree sensationalism (exemplified by violence, conflict disaster, scandal) , its treatment of familiar people or life situations , its closeness to home characters and timeless (Janda, Berry and Goldman), whereas, neutrality and objectivity remain the core factor in the media reportage, the media cannot be said to be operating on these premises, the media often tends towards bias it reportage bias is "expression of political views that systematically the values or interest of one group or another" (Heywood, 2007) in this sense, religion and ethnicity play important role in shaping the views of journalist most especially in plural society like Nigeria. The altitude towards bias poses serious threat to the political and culminates in more tension between ethnic nationality in one hand and religion organization

on the other hand. Thus, reportage that is devoid of objectivity creates more problem than the solution it is meant to provide.

Udoudo and Asak (2008) submit that "the news media seemed to have abandoned their core duty of truthfully reporting events, activities and personalities. Instead, they join the fray, individual taking sides either in favour or against government in power" primordial instead of civic loyalty exist in our media industry. Citizen including media practitioners attach strong feelings to their ethnic nationalities rather than the common and collective interest of the state.

Media practitioners especially reporters usually face herculean task in the midst of conflicts. There have been cases of harassment of journalists and confiscation of their equipment thereby subjecting them into fear and intimidation. For instance, "security operatives beat a Channels Television cameraman who attempted to take pictures of a raid on the house of Niger Delta volunteer force (NDVF) leader, Asari Dokubo in Abuja in august 1,2008" (Human Right Watch, 2008).

As critical as media role is in conflict situation, "the press is hampered in its ability to play this role by harassment of journalist such as death, torture, official coercion, charges of contempt, sedition and criminal defamation," (Karlson, 2000).

It is on this note that Ojo (2003) argued that from empirical data, the mass media has not found it so easy under the current democratic experience since the critical assessment revealed that the travail of mass media under the current arrangement would make one conclude that the past military regimes generally believed to be anti press should not be castigated since the civilian regime has not fared better.

Regardless of the above and irrespective of the various shortcomings that may surface, the media is expected to discharge its duties with utmost boldness and sincerity. This is of the fact that, the issue of conflict demands that "the truth should be told always and that charlatans and Saints should be called by their proper names" (Awolowo, 1981).

## Conclusion

The issue of insecurity in Nigeria has become prevalence. To overcome this menace, the efforts of all stakeholders are indeed imperative. In this sense, the media plays a prominent role despite various atrocities being committed against the media in crisis situation. Crisis becomes escalated or has its tempo reduced based on the information that flows from the media. The media therefore has a duty to perform to minimize crisis in a political system.

## Recommendations

Having established the fact that mass media plays a prominent role in crisis period, the following recommendations will be of advantage:

- Freedom of the press should be guaranteed by the government such that the system will be devoid of fear and intimidation of the media.
- Security personnel within the political system should work with the media and also protect them against security risk and threat.
- The media should guide against publishing stories that can heat up the polity. Only information that can promote peace and harmony within and among the conflicting parties and warring factions should be published.
- The media should endeavour to exhibit professionalism in their conduct and should guide against sensationalism and introduction of personal values and bias to news reportage.
- The Freedom of Information (FOI) act should be allowed to work effectively. This will allow the media access to undiluted information.

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