

## ASSESSMENT OF NEWSPAPER REPORTAGE ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

*The role of mass media (newspaper) in facilitating, supporting and consolidating democracy, human right and good governance vis-à-vis addressing socio-economic, legal and infrastructural inadequacy in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. Human right and governance are intertwined, but what is the relationship of newspaper reportage on it in Nigeria. This study examined newspaper reportage on human right and governance. It examined the key issues and impact of mass media reportage as well as factors militating against effective newspaper reportage on human right and governance in Nigeria. The study is based on descriptive research design. Questionnaires were administered to 70 journalists and interview 21 others. This was supplemented by secondary data from journals, textbook, newspapers, and magazine, internet etc. Data were analyzed using frequency, percentage and graphs. Based on the findings, the study revealed that newspaper reportage has enhanced protection of human right as well as promoting good governance. Also, newspaper reportage played significant role in resisting oppression and the attention of Nigerians to maladministration of any form. It concluded that newspaper reportage on human rights and governance are critical to good governance and improve democracy in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Newspaper, Mass Media, Governance, Human Right, Maladministration, Democracy.

### 1.0 Introduction

An egalitarian society is believed to be one in which all the citizens in one form or the other together determines public policy, laws and actions of the system is enhanced by the media, most especially newspaper reportage of human rights resulting to good governance. This encompasses a democratic society where the principles of democracy, fundamental human rights and good governance prevails in the polity as well as where the tenets of the rule of law hold sway. The practice of democracy and the rule of law are expected to

guarantee the protection of the political, social and economic rights of the citizenry, coupled with freedom of expression where there is an establishment of communication acting as the nexus between the government and the governed. The essence of this is to ensure the responsiveness of the government in responding to the yearnings of the people. The people also expressing their views and dissatisfaction to the governing authorities without fear of intimidation in an atmosphere devoid of hindrances.

Governance itself is a component of democracy which consists of a complex array of processes, organizations and institutions that acts as channels for citizens to exercise their legal rights, attempting to resolve differences, fulfill their obligations to the society and express their concerns and interests (Getu 2000).

Adeyeri (2011:15), asserts that "Democracy is now a fundamental human right recognized by international institutions and laws. In other words there is now a legal binding principle in international law on the right of every socially and politically organized community on the face of the earth to democratic rule of governance." This declaration justifies the actions of Nigeria Mass Media on its activities given its antecedents of struggling for the enthronement of Democracy and defending the fundamental human rights that result from a democratic system of government. In Nigeria for instance we have always had a democratic constitution as epitomized by the 1960, 1963, 1979, 1989 and 1999 constitutions. Ironically, that has not saved the country from despotic tendencies and the constitution is usually the first victim during any military intervention in governance (Adeyeri, 2011). In corroboration, Olaiya, Apeloko and Ayeni (2013:7) held that "the Nigeria mass media provided a united front and posed an aggressive opposition against military government which consequently led to the emergence of a democratic government in 1999."

The role of the mass media (Newspaper) in facilitating, supporting and consolidating democracy, human rights and good governance is a *sine qua non* in addressing socio-economic, legal, infrastructural inadequacy to achieve greater media effectiveness in promoting democratic ideals and governance in Nigeria. However, Chapter 4 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal

Republic of Nigeria (Sections 33 to 46) stipulates the principles of fundamental human rights, while good governance which consists of general values, basic freedoms, accountability, competence, responsiveness, absence of human abuse and the rule of law. In the context of the apparent problems and frequent setbacks, scholars and policymakers alike have become aware of the crucial role of the mass media in processes of democratization and consolidation in upholding governance and fundamental human rights. However, like political institutions, the print media in many new democracies (especially Nigeria) often seem to lack the qualities that would qualify them for playing a key role in protecting fundamental human right, promoting democratic tenets, accountability and inclusive politics evidenced by current situation of Nigeria. They are frequently criticized for remaining too close to political power holders to be able to act as effective watch-dog in sustaining human rights and governance.

Against this background, this study examines the role of the mass media in the process of democratic consolidation in Nigeria vis-à-vis its reportage pattern of human right. This process that exists between the government and the governed is effectively supervised by the mass media (newspaper) in order to ensure the maintenance and sustenance of democracy. This study tends to assess Newspaper reportage on human rights in Nigeria from 2013 to 2016 and cut across five widely read Newspapers. Newspaper popularly referred to as print media, equips and orientates the Nigerian public with informative and educative publications on their rights, development, the actions, functions and activities of the institutions of government in advancing an enlightened society as well as protects citizens from the excessive tendencies of government.

## 1. Statement of the Problem

The Economist as cited by Owens (1999) quoted in Apeloko *et al* (2013) stated that “the people learn about how they are governed, from what they read in the newspapers and what they see on the television news. Unless voters know something about how they are governed, they cannot have an intelligent opinion about it. However, without an intelligent opinion about government, you cannot have a health democracy”. This assertion presupposes that the absence of a free press in any polity means the non-existent of democracy, but the absence of democracy will not necessary mean the death of the press. The presence of the mass media or a viable press is critical to the entronement of democracy in any system more specifically in Nigeria. This manifestation stretches beyond the scope of entrenching democracy but also include good governance, attainment of political independence, wielded by nationalists for the propagation and advancement of their political course (Mwangi 1998 as cited by Apeloko, *et al*, 2013).

The socio-economic and political structure of a society is determined by the manner of operation of the mass media in that society. The socio-economic and political structure of the Nigerian society is one which is capitalist, underdeveloped, dependent, complex, transitional, and multicultural or plural in terms of cultural diversities (as quoted in Aina, 1999). The character and operations of the mass media are a reflection of these realities of the Nigerian society. According to Kur (2003), they represent the interests of the dominant class and seek to achieve the objectives of the class they represent. Along the same reasoning, Nwankwo (1987) describes the Nigerian mass media as bourgeois in character, representing the bourgeois Nigerian society. A bourgeois media cannot be for the best interest of the people. Such media operate to reinforce the status

quo. The media may enjoy freedom of expression, but that freedom conforms only to the real economic and political realities of the capitalist system (Udoakah, 1990).

In what appears contrary to the foregoing, but is really not, is that the mass media in Nigeria, especially the privately-owned newspapers are highly critical of government of the day. Even under repressive military dictatorships like those of Muhamadu Buhari, Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha, the media mustered the courage to criticize and challenge the dictators. Their exploit is understood along the ideological thinking of power interaction among members of the ruling class who were both military and civilians. From the backdrop of the foregoing, character of the Nigerian mass media and their operations are affected by organizational structure, internal and external factors to the media (Pate, 2012). Hence, political pressures and interferences, lack of professionalism, ethical violations, undue ethnic and sectional interests, poor remuneration of media workers, poorly maintained and inadequate facilities, poor training of media workers, over-commercialization of the media, and poor regulatory framework are the major problems militating against the effective performance of the mass media (Sowunmi, *et al*, 2010). This, is the bane of the newspaper reportage in Nigeria which if not deliberately checked will be a complete shirk of responsibility on the part of the mass media (newspaper) as against the democratic role saddled on it by the constitution as the watch-dog of society. Human right is part of basis for evaluating governance, but how is both enhanced by newspaper reportage in Nigeria? This study therefore, is an attempt to assess how human right and governance in Nigeria is being affected by Newspaper reportage.

The general objective of this study is to examine Newspaper reportage on human rights and its impact on governance in Nigeria

from 2013 to 2016. The specific objectives are to examine the key issues in mass media and human rights in Nigeria between 2013 and 2016; investigate the impact of mass media reportage on human rights between 2013 and 2016 in Nigeria; and analyse the militating factors against the effective reportage of human rights and governance in Nigeria.

## **2.0 Mass Media**

Mass Media consist of Newspapers, Radio and Television which are constituted and designed to communicate or transmit information to the mass of people. It represents the vehicle with which information is conveyed and communicated between parties. In every democracy information is seen as very critical and important as it ensures mutual understanding between the government and the citizens. Without reliable information it will be difficult if not impossible for citizens to exercise their rights effectively in determining who becomes the President or Governor in the time of elections. This is not farfetched from the fact that Mass Media is regarded as the source of information that provides the nexus between the government and the governed.

Thus, it becomes the responsibility of the Media to set agenda in the polity guiding the citizenry in their participation of bringing governance to bear; through information influencing the activities of government programmes, policies and its consequent impact on society. This is because agenda setting by the Media moulds public opinion which in the long run determines the societal problem or anomaly they (people) give priority in their preference for would-be political leaders to address when elected into office. On the other hand the Mass Media promotes the molded public opinion through publications, news feeds, editorials and programmes communicating it to political office aspirants who in turn inculcates the

preference of the people into their manifesto in soliciting for the votes of the electorates.

Thus, the Mass Media enlightens the public on government policies, protect their constitutional right to participate in the governance of their land and also communicating the position and activities of government to the people.

Thus, McQuail (2013) asserts that Mass Media is a;

“precondition and indispensable for both government accountability and social accountability. The daily flow of information and news generates a “running tally” of government policies, political events and actions of political officials on the basis of which citizens’ make choice. The Mass Media is expected to provide a forum where a broad range of voices, opposition parties, civil society actors, independent experts and ordinary citizens can express alternative.”

## **2.1 Media as the Fourth Realm of Administration**

The Mass Media is popularly, politically and scholarly referred to as the fourth realm or branch of government. Just as the constitutionally saddled responsibility of law enactment, law implementation and adjudication of conflict on the legislative, executive and judicial arms of government respectively with the oversight function of checks and balance; so the Mass Media (Press) assumes the status of an arm of government but independent of government control. Thereby, portraying it with the status of an institution with the branches of government providing a system of checks and balance to control political officials, government actions, abuse and misuse of power. Just as the core of governance advocates the application and practice of the principle of separation of powers between the conventional arms of

government imposing legal restrictions on one arm, from meddling unwholesomely in the jurisdiction and affairs of the other arm, yet permitting the arms of government to form relationship that enhance governance and administration, for purposes of joint promotion of good governance in carrying out their primary responsibilities; So the relationship of the Mass Media, “the daily routines of news production, interaction between journalists and politicians are characterized by a high degree of cooperation, frequently – even a symbiotic relationship, where each side benefit from their respective counterpart.” (Blumler and Guveritch) as quoted by McQuail, (2013).

The Mass Media such as Newspaper, Radio and Television with the peculiarity of their duty – when carried out objectively most times puts them in adversarial position with the politicians and government authorities. Mass Media (News Paper) reports on several issues such as; withholding Pension funds from Pensioners with no reasonable excuse, owing of the federal or state civil servants backlog of salaries, police brutality of innocent and armless civilians, bribery and corruption among top government functionaries, misappropriation of public funds and the lopsided application of law to incarcerate the ordinary citizen and the unlawful justification of the elite in society, brings journalists into logger heads with the government and politicians. The art of checking the excesses of government and balancing the actions of government official with the powers allocated to them by the constitution. Just as the application of judicial review explains one of its oversight functions in checking the excesses of the legislature in enacting laws; the executive actions that tends to maladministration in suppressing fundamental rights of the citizens which is opposed by summoning such executive agent to parliament and consequently barring such

anti-social actions by the executive and the control exercised by the executive over the judiciary in appointing judges.

As these actions among the arms of government cause friction and put one arm in adversarial position against the other promoting democracy; so the unflinching performance of the watch-dog role of the Mass Media most generally negates some interests of government, all of which promotes and contribute to a healthy governance. The existence of this relationship among the four institutions (that is, between the Mass Media and the government in general) cause some sort of conflict or disagreement that disrupts the relationship between the Media and government authorities. Thus, sometimes preventing access of journalists to government officials and politicians from obtaining some insider off the record information critical to governance.

In Nigeria’s recent democracy, the Mass Media played a great role in enthroning it and its actions viz the performance of its primary obligation has not only put government on its toes or regulate government actions toward the citizens or promoting good governance – but also put the Press as the left tagged as critical enemies to the government. McQuail explains that “the chances for watch-dog journalism are even more restricted in new democracies where the functional independence between the politicians and journalists is still over shadowed by the legacy of suppression and censorship. In the old regime, political leaders even those who are committed to democratic values – find it hard to accept an adversarial Press that demands public justification of policy decisions and political conduct.”

## **2.2 Newspaper**

In Nigeria, the print media as portrayed by the Newspaper played an important role in educating and informing citizens on their rights as well as the violations of such rights.

One cannot dispute the fact that the origin of News Papers in Nigeria itself lay in the challenging dispensation of the colonial era, independent, post-independent and military era; when the denial of political, economic, social and fundamental human rights was regarded as a norm.

In Lagos, during the colonial era, when the fight and struggle for national self-determination in government was gathering momentum, the nationalists activists News Paper outlets, constantly attracted the wrath of the British government because it drew attention of the readers to the gross violation of peoples dignity and rights. In the independent and post independent periods too, the News Papers were constantly attracting the anger and harassment of the government for trying to take the truth to the people. The vibrancy of the News Papers outfit was due to the fact that the Press was pluralized and the nationalists agitating for self-government most of who were educated in England and the United States some of whom also own Press outfits – like Dr. NnamdiAzikiwe, Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Albert Macaulay, just to mention a few, owns press outfits during the time of agitation for self-government. Significant section of the News Papers did oppose events that have changed the cause of the Nigeria political history – the corrupt acts of government in 1960, the military coup de tat of 1966, the murder of the Sultan of Sokoto, Ahmadu Bello, the Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the counter coup that brought in Yakubu Gowon, the murder of over 5000 Igbos in Northern Nigeria, the civil war which claimed three million Igbos mostly women and children and the starvation of the Easterners as a measure to force them to surrender and the blockade of humanitarian services from foreign agencies to the region; all represents human right violation of which the watch-dog role was effectively played by the Mass Media.

The post-independent epoch witnessed another dimension in the Nigerian polity where the Press and politicians have a relationship that has started existing hand-in-hand since the discovery of the need for proper information to the public and the demand for ensuring governance – the responsibility of the welfare state. This has made the political functionaries to constitute a major source of information for the Press since they are saddled with the charge of general responsibilities of dispensing affairs of state; and the Press presents itself a conduit for the politicians to influence the electorates. Thus, Udoaka quoted Gurevitch and Blumber (1997) that both institutions are conditioned by mutual power relationship based in the society, “the power of the political institution lies in his functions as an articulator of interest and mobilizer of social power for purposeful political action, whereas the Press has theirs from three sources which are;

- a) The unique capacity of the media to deliver to the politician an audience which in size and composition is unavailable to him by other means,
- b) The relation of credibility and trust following their fulfilment of audience expectation in the past and
- c) The need to safeguard the citizens against abuse by political authority.

Contextually, the Press cannot be isolated or exempted from the politics of society or country, this exemption being contemplated logically brings to the fore the argument that for the proper dissemination of information to the public on political affairs and happenings in the polity and activities of politicians and policy agenda, the Press should be located in the centre of politics publishing information that arises as a result and make it known to concerned citizens. This function of the Press provides profound knowledge of information

and enlightens the civic consciousness of the electorates which develops citizen's popular participation in government (democracy).

### 2.3 Human Rights

Human rights are those rights that all persons or people are entitled to because they are human beings. Human rights are the unadulterated inalienable rights or privileges that cannot be negated. These rights are privileges that are given or endued man by nature and by virtue of the fact that he or she is a human being. These rights include:

- a) Section 33. Right to Life,
- b) Section 34. Right to dignity of human person,
- c) Section 35. Right to personal liberty,
- d) Section 36. Right to fair hearing,
- e) Section 37. Right to private and family life,
- f) Section 38. Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion,
- g) Section 39. Right to freedom of expression and the press,
- h) Section 40. Right to peaceful assembly and association,
- i) Section 41. Right to freedom of movement,
- j) Section 42. Right to freedom from discrimination,
- k) Section 43. Right to acquire and own immovable property anywhere in Nigeria,
- l) Section 44. Compulsory acquisition of property,
- m) Section 45. Restriction on and derogation from fundamental, and
- n) Section 46. Special jurisdiction of High Court and legal aid.

It is obligatory for the government and duty bound on the authorities to have regard to the

provisions of the constitution as it concerns human rights. Human rights abuse is a situation where human beings are denied their natural rights, rights that are inherent, that are natural, that were not created by the state; if they are not allowed to exercise these rights on their own either through the instruments of the state denying or depriving the people of their natural rights amounts to sheer abuse and derogation from constitutional provisions.

Human rights discourse emerges in the twentieth century captured in the background experienced during the two World Wars, but the gruesome acts of abuse of human rights had already started before or predate this period. The fear of the Nation-States exploiting their subjects was rampant an assertion that gave credibility to what happened in Nigeria between 1967 and 1970 (the thirty months of Biafra civil war). Professor Chinua Achebe in his book "There was a Country" in page 82 gave a brief account of one out of numerous cases of human rights abuse: "Six months later, I watched horrified as Northern officers carried out a revenge coup in which they killed Igbo officers and men in large number. If it had ended there, the matter might have been seen as a very tragic interlude in nation building, a horrendous tit for tat. But the Northerners turned on Igbo civilians living in the North and unleashed waves of brutal massacres that Colin Legum of *The Observer* (UK) was the first to describe as a pogrom. Thirty thousand civilian men, women and children were slaughtered, hundreds of thousands were wounded, maimed and violated, their homes and property looted and burned – and no one asked any questions. A Sierra Leonean living in Northern Nigeria at the time wrote home in horror: "the killing of the Igbos have become a state industry in Nigeria." What terrified me about the massacres in Nigeria was this: if it was only a question of rioting in the streets

and so on, that would be bad enough, but it could be explained. It happens everywhere in the world. But in this particular case a detailed plan for mass killing was implemented by the government – the army, the police – the very people who were there to protect life and property. Not a single person has been punished for the crimes. It was not just human nature, a case of somebody hating his neighbor and chopping off his head.”

### **3.0 Methodology**

This research work is based on a descriptive-survey research. The study area is South Western Nigeria, where print media are randomly selected in three states, i.e. Osun State, Oyo State and Lagos State respectively. The population of this research work comprises staff of seven Newspaper outfits (five newspapers and two magazines) in the selected states. The selected media houses are; The New Telegraph, The Punch News Paper, The Guardian News Paper, The Nation News Paper, Vanguard News Paper; Tell Magazine and News Magazine. The researcher

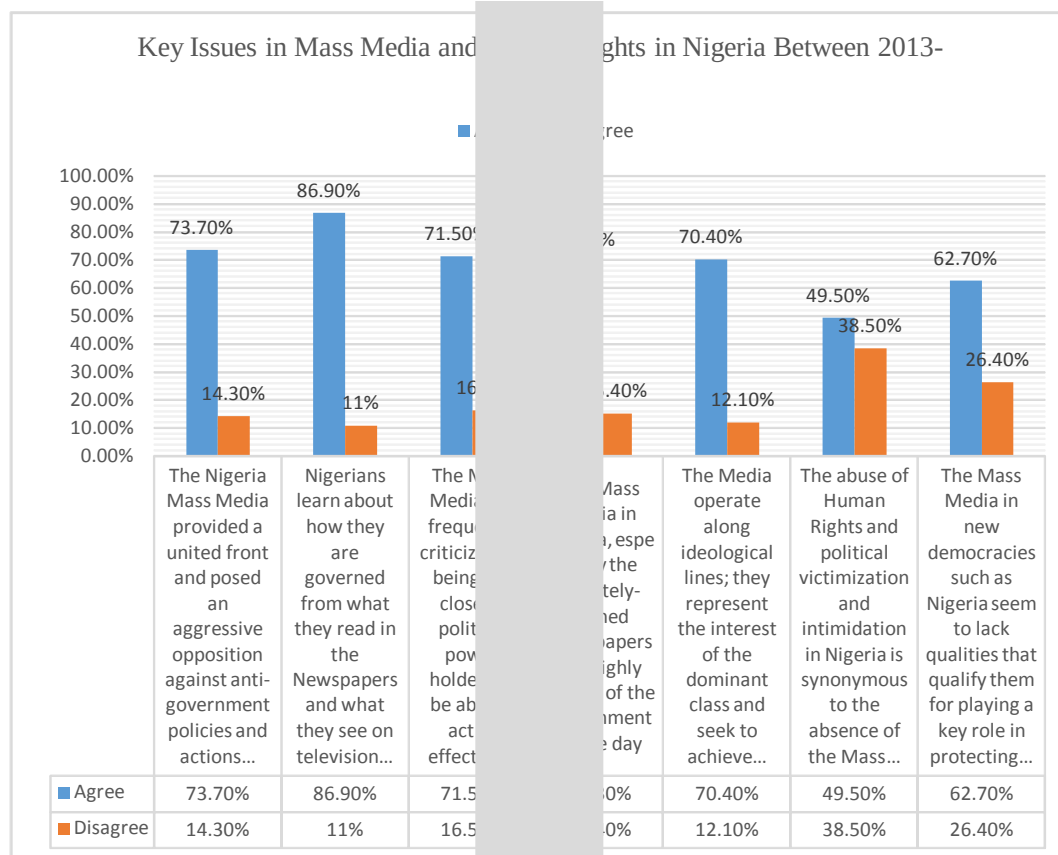
makes use of both stratified random sampling and simple random method.

Ten (10) staff were randomly selected from each of the stated press outfits (both News Paper and Magazine) for the administration of questionnaire totaling Seventy (70) and Three (3) administrative/research/field reporters randomly selected from both groups (News Papers and Magazines) totaling Twenty-One (21) on interview session; a grand total of Ninety-One (91) staff.

For the purpose of this study, data are collected from both primary and secondary sources of data collection. The primary source is through administration of questionnaire and interview to selected respondents and secondary sources includes use of textbooks, journals, News Papers, Magazines, internet, reports as well as conference papers. The data collected from both questionnaire and interview sources were analyzed using appropriate content analysis, descriptive statistics such as graph, frequency distributions and percentages.

## 4.0 Data Analysis

### 4.1. Examining the Key Issues in Mass Media and Human Rights in Nigeria



Source: Field Survey, 2017.

The graph above is a tabular presentation of Key Issues in Mass Media and Human Rights in Nigeria Between 2013-2016. The findings show that the respondents who were majorly journalists believed that the Nigeria Mass Media provided a united front and posed an aggressive opposition against anti-government policies and actions which upheld Human Rights with a total of 73.7% of respondents in support of the stance. However, as 12.1% were undecided, and the remaining 14.3% disagreed. A massive percentage of 86.9% of

the respondents agreed that Nigerians learn about how they are governed from what they read in the Newspapers and what they see on television news. By contrast, 11% disagreed while a very low 2.2% remained undecided.

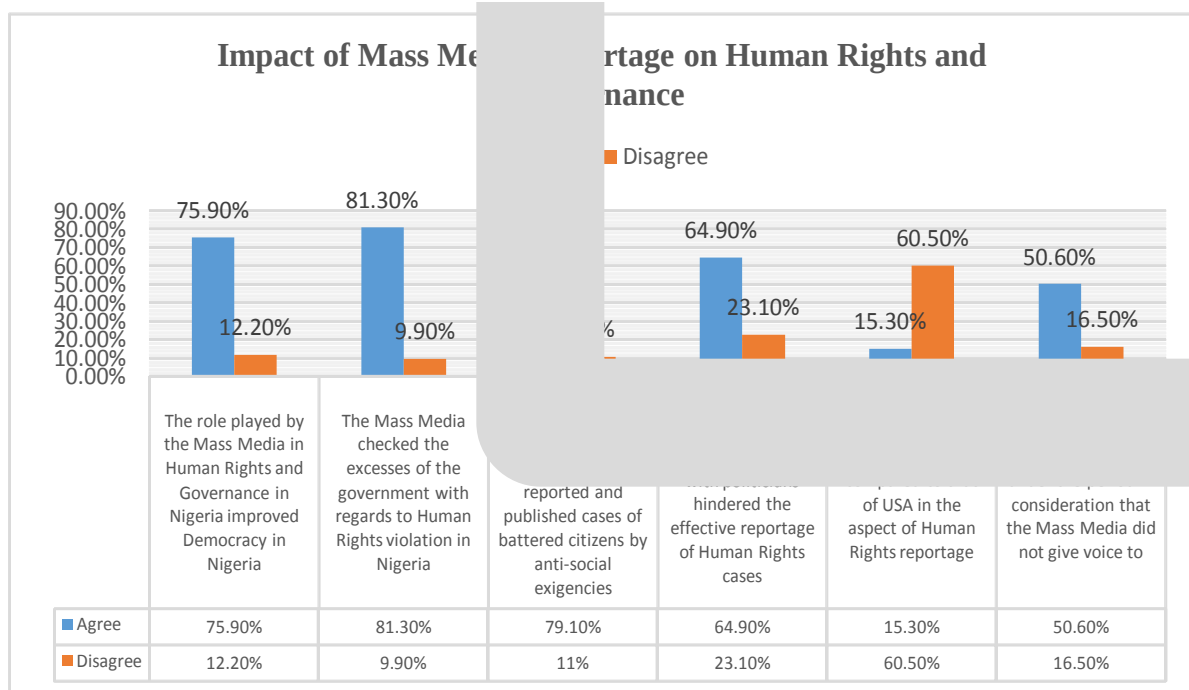
The interplay of the mass media and politicians while still guiding the interest and rights of the citizens is of great concern. As such, respondents were asked on the frequent criticism of Mass Media for being too close to political power holders and their ability to act as effective watchdog in sustaining Human

Rights and Governance. While 71.5% of the respondents agreed that this closeness to political power holders might actually hinder their ability to act as effective watchdog in sustaining Human Rights and Governance, 12.1% were indifferent, while 16.5% disagreed. Also, close to 70% of the respondents (69.3%) agreed that the media operate along ideological lines; they represent the interest of the dominant class and seek to achieve the objectives of the class they represent, however, 15.4% each of the respondents were equally neutral as they provided no valid response, while the other 15% disagreed.

Another Key Issues in Mass Media and Human Rights in Nigerian is whether the Mass Media in Nigeria, especially the privately-owned Newspapers are highly critical of the

government of the day. 70.4% agreed that these privately-owned Newspapers are critical of the government of the day, that they pay keen attention to the operations of the government. 17.6% were indifferent, and 12.1% disagreed. The abuse of Human Rights and political victimization and intimidation in Nigeria is synonymous to the absence of the Mass Media, close to half of the respondents (49.5%) agreed, as 12.1% were neutral, and 38.5% disagreed. Finally, not all of the respondents though a greater percentage believed that the Mass Media in new democracies such as Nigeria lack qualities that qualify them for playing a key role in protecting Human Rights. To this position, 62.7% agreed while 11.0% of the respondents were neutral, 26.4% disagreed.

#### 4.2 The Impact of Mass Media Reportage on Human Rights and Governance in Nigeria



Source: Field Survey, 2017.

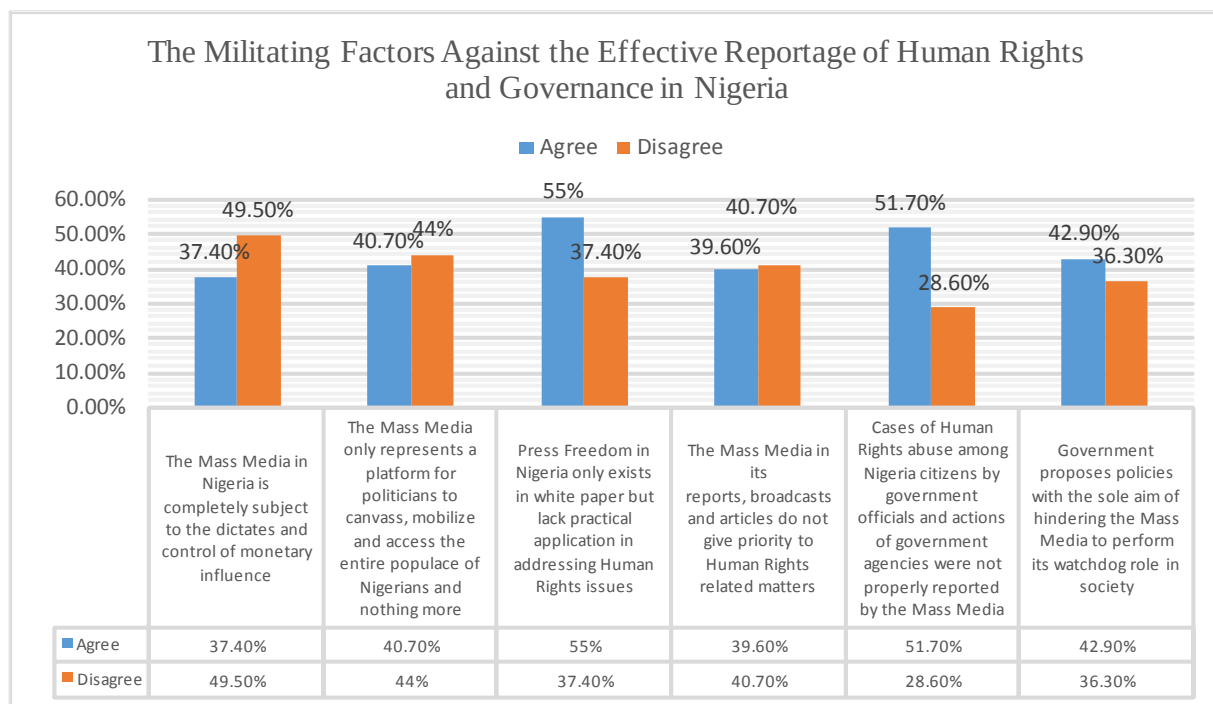
Graph 4.2 above is a presentation of the impact of Mass Media Reportage on Human Rights and governance in Nigeria. A total of 75.9% of the respondents agreed that there exist impacts of Mass Media Reportage on Human Rights and governance in Nigeria, this was obvious with a large percentage of respondents who threw their weight behind the perspective. However, 14.3% disagreed, and the remaining 9.9% were undecided. One significant impact noticeable is that Mass Media is used to check the excesses of the government with regards to Human Rights violation in Nigeria. This was affirmed by 81.3% of the respondents, as 8.8% were undecided, and 9.9% disagreed.

Another key impact of Mass Media Reportage on Human Rights and Governance in Nigeria is that Newspapers and Magazines effectively report and publish cases of battered citizens by anti-social exigencies as agreed by 79.1% of the respondents while less than 15% disagreed (11%) and 9.9% neither agreed nor disagreed. More than half of the respondents (64.9%) believed that the closeness maintained by Media Journalists

with politicians hindered the effective reportage of Human Rights cases. 12.1% of the respondents were indifferent, while the remaining 23.1% did not see the relationship of Media Journalists with politicians as a menace to the effective reportage of Human Rights cases.

When comparing Nigeria's journalism with that of USA, only very few respondents were of the opinion that the Nigerian Mass Media can be compared to that of USA in the aspect of Human Rights reportage with only 15.3% of the respondents who answered in favour of the position that yes, the Nigerian Mass Media can be compared to that of USA in the aspect of Human Rights reportage. However, 24.2% were neutral, a greater percentage of 60.5% disagreed and probably didn't see any element of comparison. Similarly, 50.6% of the respondents agreed that Human Rights issues abound under the period in consideration that the Mass Media did not give voice to. On the contrary, 16.5% disagreed, as they had contrary opinion. The remaining of the respondents (33.0%) neither agreed nor disagreed.

### 4.3 The Militating Factors against the Effective Reportage of Human Rights and Governance in Nigeria



**Source: Field Survey, 2017.**

Graph 4.3 above is a presentation of the Militating Factors Against Effective Reportage of Human Rights and Governance. One noticeable factor is monetary influence. The respondents were asked if the Mass Media in Nigeria is completely subject to the dictates and control of monetary influence, close to half the respondents (49.5%) disagreed that the Nigerian Mass Media are not ruled by monetary influence, while 37.4% were undecided, the remaining 37.4% agreed, as they believed that Nigerian Mass Media are objects of monetary influence.

When considering whether Mass Media only represents a platform for politicians to canvass, mobilize and access the entire populace of Nigerians and nothing more, this was agreed by 40.7% of the respondents. Another 44% of the respondents disagreed as

they believed that the Mass Media serve more purposes other than that, 15.4% were indifferent.

Freedom of the press is one of Nigeria's fundamental human rights entitled by citizens entrenched in chapter 4, section 39 of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 as amended. While over 50% (55%) of the respondents believe that Press Freedom in Nigeria only exists in white paper but lack practical application in addressing Human Rights issues. 37.4% believe in contrast that there are noticeable practices of the freedom of press in Nigeria's democracy while 7.7% of the respondents couldn't tell if the freedom of press in Nigeria can be felt outside the paper work or not. Also, the Mass Media in its reports, broadcasts and articles do not give priority to Human Rights related matters, this

was agreed by 39.6% of the respondents, as 19.8% were neutral, and 40.7% of the respondents disagreed.

Over 50% (51.7%) of the respondents believed that cases of Human Rights abuse among Nigeria citizens by government officials and actions of government agencies were not properly reported by the Mass Media. While 28.6% disagreed, 19.7% were indifferent. Finally, the policies of government in any political dispensation could make or mar the performance and activities of the mass media. As such, 42.9% of the respondents believe that the government proposed policies tend to hinder the Mass Media performance of their functions as watchdog in the society. By contrast, 36.3% disagreed and 20.9% were indifferent.

#### **4.4 Analysis of Data Generated Through Interview**

Interview was conducted with twenty one journalists working with widely read Nigerian newspapers at the Nigeria Union of Journalist (NUJ) Correspondence Chapel Osogbo and Ibadan respectively. The Correspondence Chapel of the NUJ offices are where journalists converge after receiving their daily schedule on the areas to cover from their respective press outfits. In executing their assignments courts of law and cases are covered, police stations, State House Assemblies, government offices, markets, schools and other areas where news are perceived to emerge.

The news that normally made the rounds or given priority to most of the times are not cases of human rights abuse and this does not mean that human rights abuse is relegated to an insignificant position. The journalists said that human rights cases are not trends that occur on daily basis, but whenever they occur that are not merely reported but the government is called upon by the press to take necessary action and some other times such stories even made the front page of the

newspapers. Human rights cases are always reported, in fact it is a professional ethic to report such cases of abuse by journalist, but they are not given first place. Government may not explicitly make laws or policies that are flagrantly abusive, oppressive or undermine fundamental human rights, but actions, body language and the outcome of some policies may show a total disregard for these rights. Though some time in 2016 there were rumors or insinuations that the Federal Government sponsored a bill to monitor the face-book accounts of Nigerians as well as curtail the way they express their dissatisfaction on governance. But the reportage of the media and the editorials from press and concerned Nigerians rose up against that stance of the government which made the Presidency to deny that allegation and the National Assembly jettison the premeditation of such bill.

The journalists also informed that the mass media (Press) promotes governance by exposing the corrupt actions of government bordering on financial embezzlement, misappropriation and mismanagement of public fund. The call on the government to employ Nigerian citizens in place of expatriates and its reports on the epileptic electric power supply by the Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) when Distribution Companies attempted to increase bills. The media through their reports made the National Assembly to mandate the National Electric Regulation Commission to suspend such increase. He further stated that this and many other ways the media has promoted governance to favour Nigerians.

The journalists stated that some of the problems the press and media encounter in trying to promote governance is victimization, intimidation and arrests and detention of journalists by the government. Recently, a journalist State House (Presidency) was evicted from the Aso Villa and subsequently

suspended from covering that area because he published an article bordering on the health of the President. The press also face incident of insecurity and threat when trying to capture and report events that requires government action most especially when the life's of people are in jeopardy and when going about their duty in bringing to the limelight what transpires in government secret dealings.

The possible way of overcoming these problems is not only the one hundred percent observation of the freedom of information law and freedom of the press; but also that security should be provided by the government to journalists and a law should be enacted criminalizing any form of attack on journalists and the press.

### **5.0 Summary of Findings**

Newspaper reportage of human rights and governance is not a natural ethic of the mass media or the press as the case may be, but it is determined by many factors. Sometimes it is motivated from the fact that the newspaper outfit is privately owned or having an ideological outlook to issues of this nature, statutory constraints or by virtue of company policy.

In a budding democracy like that of Nigeria, having press outfits questioning government authority or fighting for the interest and protection of human rights cannot be totally ruled out but in fact fundamental to promoting good governance *viz-a-viz* an egalitarian society. Though in any political setting where the press is up and doing, performing their functional role as watchdog of society affixing eagle eye on the activities of government will always attract enmity and be at logger heads with the authorities. Notwithstanding, the government itself will always be mindful of the probing eyes of the press therefore arbitrary actions, excessive tendencies and anti-masses dispositions are not only checked and

curtailed but also to ensure that the political social and economic rights of citizens are protected.

The study as shown that even in democracies human rights can be abused, and that one of the most effective way to ensure good governance is to ensure the freedom of the press as it is state in section 39 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 as amended. This is effectively done as the mass media keeps to its obligation as stated in section 22 of the 1999 constitution that "The press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this chapter and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people".

The findings of the study also highlighted the role played by the press standing up to the government, resisting oppression and drawing the attention of Nigerians to maladministration, thus aiding the effective reportage of human rights issues and governance. These findings agree with the findings made by Apelo, et al (2013) who appraised the Nigerian Press as a dogged fighter and preserver of democracy and governance. This suggests that the Press in Nigeria defends and reports human rights issues which ensures governance and within the time frame specified for this study effectively played its watchdog role in the society.

### **5.1 Conclusion**

Considering the findings of this study, it was concluded that newspaper reportage of human rights and governance are critical ways of ensuring good governance. Thus, following the majority of the respondents' response, it can also be concluded that human rights is inextricably linked to governance and that not only do Nigerians learn how they are governed from what they read in newspapers but that

the press and the mass media in performing its watchdog role entrenched democratic norms into the Nigerian polity. It is equally concluded that freedom of the press does not exist only on white paper and black ink, but very practically expressed and practiced in Nigeria. Finally, it is concluded that though there are many cases of human rights that the press did not report under the time frame considered in this study, yet this does not imply that the press shirked their responsibility as watchdog of society.

## 5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is hereby recommended that the Freedom of Information Law (FOI ACT) should be allowed to have its full course without hindrance in term of government undue interference; Nigerians through this law demand press freedom, accountability, and transparency as well as ensure the responsiveness of government to its citizens.

- I. The judicial arm of government should always stand against executive policy with the intent to limit press freedom through the instrument of judicial review and it should also be made a criminal offence government agencies withhold vital information from the public even when
- II. Also, journalists or the press should not misuse their closeness to politicians and government official as a hindrance to calling the government its responsibilities when the authorities are deviating democratic conventions. Section 22 of the 1999 constitution and the freedom of information is not only to protect the press but also to empower them to hold government accountable. Thus there should be strict constitutional application of these statutes.
- III. Finally, it should be codified into government policies, statutes and the Nigerian law mandating the security agencies not only to defer to journalists when functioning and performing their duties, but to also offer protection to the press. This is because since the three tiers of government are given constitutional status and security, the media and press which is referred to as the fourth realm of administration, though constitutionally recognized should also be accorded protection through constitutional means. Because they all perform the function of checks and balances to protect human right and ensure good governance.

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