

Reflecting On Media Obligations For Electoral Reform In Nigeria

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Abstract:

Electoral reform had taken front stage in the electoral history of Nigeria because of weak political structures and electoral malpractices characterized by various forms of electoral manipulations and disorderliness. The study reflected on media obligations for electoral reform in Nigeria. The paper critically highlighted the developments of electoral reform and the roles the media obligation in electoral reform in Nigeria. The paper is exploratory and explanatory in nature as it adopts analytical and qualitative review of literature as its research method. The paper showed the mass media are significant for electoral reform because they provide essential information about our political system and development. The ruling class, politicians and political parties interest in electoral reform is for personal and part's needs, not really the interest of the electorate. It is expected therefore, that electoral reform should start with the political parties. However, the media should advocate for behaviour reform. This is believed to be the best electoral reform.

Keywords: *Election; Electorate; Electoral reform; Media obligations; Political parties*

Introduction

Studies have showed that the reasons for electoral reform in Nigeria were as a result of weak political structures and electoral malpractices, characterised by various forms of electoral manipulations, vote buying, snatching of ballot papers and boxes, duplication of ballot papers; impersonation, rigging of elections, violence, assassination and assassination attempt, threat to lives, ethnic and religious rivalries, intimidation and harassment of voters before and during election day and among others (Animashaun, 2010; Popoola, 2011; Osinakachukwu & Jawan, 2011; Ebirim, 2013; Obah-Akpowoghaha, 2013; Shehu, Othman, & Osman, 2017). It is sad to note that many electoral conflicts in developing countries like Nigeria usually end in electoral tribunals and courts to decide the winner. These are common features in the history of elections in Nigeria.

Electoral reform had been associated with electoral development in Nigeria. In Nigeria, since independence, various elections have been conducted from 1964/65; 1979; 1983; 1990; 1991; 1993; 1999; 2003; 2007; 2011 (Odeomelam, 2011); to 2015 and 2019. These past elections were characterised by numerous electoral problems. These electoral problems gave rise to the need for change in electoral systems as desired by the public and made manifest in election result.

The history of elections in Nigeria is traced to the colonial period of 1923 when the first series of elections were held in Lagos and Calabar (Shehu; Othman; & Osman, 2017) For example, Sir Hugh Clifford's Constitution of 1922 contained an elective principle, which sought for the election of some members of the Legislative Council, specifically, 3 people from Lagos and 1 from Calabar (Popoola, 2011), which was later held in September 20, 1923 (Shehu, et.al. 2017). This imbalance elective principle actual needed a reform. Though the elective principle or constitution was imbalance and selective, it rather served as a catalyst for

the formation of political parties and further improvement in the elective processes in Nigeria (Odoemelam, 2011).

The electoral body charged for conducting elections date back before independence as Electoral Commission of Nigeria in 1959 (ECN). It was later changed to Federal Electoral Commission of Nigeria (FEDECO) in 1960. FEDECO conducted elections in 1964 and 1965; 1979 under General Olusegun Obasanjo, and 1983 when Alhaji Shehu Shagari was the Executive President of Nigeria. Various persons chaired the electoral body at different times and used various electoral reform techniques.

Most popular of the electoral reform system was the Secret Ballot System (SBS). It was used in 1964, when Chief Eyo Esua was the chairman of the Electoral Body and, also in 1979, when Chief Michael Ani was the chairman. In 1983, Justice Victor Ovie Whiskey became the chairman, while in 1987 to 1989; Prof. Eme Awa was also chairman when Gen. Ibrahim Babangida (rtd) was the military president. The electoral reform was to make the General as a civilian president. In 1993, when Prof. Humphrey Nwosu became the national electoral boss, he introduced the Option A4 balloting system or Open Ballot System (OBS) as electoral reform to curb malpractices and to ensure transparency for free and fair election. The Option A4 was believed by many Nigerians to be very good voting system since the election was acclaimed and adjudged by Nigerians and the international observers and community as the fairest and freest election in the history of elections in Nigeria. In 1994 to 1998, Chief Summer Dagogo Jack became chairman of the electoral commission when the late Gen. Sani Abacha was the military Head of State. The late Gen. Sani Abacha changed the electoral name to National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON). It was only a nomenclature reform. Chief Summer Dagogo Jack electoral reform was to usher in the late Gen. Sani Abacha as life civilian President but fate proved otherwise. The late Abacha's idea to be life President was a political system obtainable in some northern Africa counties like Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco (though kingship). Also, in 1998 to 1999, Justice Ephraim Akpata became the chairman of the electoral body when Gen. Abdulsalam Abubakar was the military head of state of Nigeria. One of the electoral reform made in Justice Ephraim Akpata's era was the renaming of the electoral umpire to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as it is called till now. Justice Ephraim Akpata in 1999 ushered in a democratic elected president, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. In 1999 to 2003, Sir Abel Guobadia was appointed as the commission chairman. Though Sir Abel Guobadia had completed four years as INEC boss, analysts believed that the then President Chief Olusegun Obasanjo removed him for some political selfish reason. Sir Abel Guobadia refused to dance to the tune of the music which many believed was Chief Olusegun Obasanjo's plan for tenure elongation. Hence, his removal and Prof. Maurice Iwu was highly recommended.

In 2005, Prof. Maurice Iwu became INEC boss. Soon after appointed as INEC chairman, Prof. Maurice Iwu announced that foreign monitors would not be allowed during the elections but only foreign election observers. Iwu could not tell the distinct differences between foreign monitors and foreign observers. It was believed that the INEC boss had a hidden agenda. Many public and political analysts were of the views that Prof. Maurice Iwu was to foster and facilitate Chief Olusegun Obasanjo third term plans through electoral reform and through a constitutional amendment after Chief Olusegun Obasanjo administration was to end in 2007. However, the general election conducted by Prof. Maurice Iwu was believed to be the worst in the history of election in Nigeria because it was marred with the highest degree of electoral malpractices, violence and frauds. It was Prof. Maurice Iwu's faulty and controversial election that brought in the late President Musa Yar'adua into power. The 2007 elections that brought in the late President Musa Yar'adua, deepened electoral problems in Nigeria. This made the President to honestly acknowledge that the election that brought him into power was faulty. The poor conduct of the 2007 polls renewed public pressures for electoral reform in Nigeria (Animashaun, 2010). In order to redeem the situation, the late President Yar'adua set up

Electoral Reform Committee with the main aim to improve on subsequent elections in Nigeria. It was this that later became Electoral Act of 2010. Prof. Maurice Iwu was the INEC boss in 2007 till 2010 when Dr. Goodluck Jonathan became the President of Nigeria.

In its resolve to ensure that the 2011 general polls were free and fair, Prof. Attahiru Muhammadu Jega, the INEC chairman as appointed by ex-President Goodluck Jonathan in June 8th, 2010 adopted the Modified Open Ballot System (MOBS) for the conduct of election. MOBS is a modified version of open ballot system (OBS) used in the general election of 1993. Under MOBS, accreditation and release of ballot papers to a voter could be done openly (Shehu *et. al.* 2017). This method of voting system as a reform introduced by INEC was faulty because many eligible voters' names disappeared from the voter list. In 2015, Prof. Attahiru Muhammadu Jega electoral reform conducted election where Muhammadu Buhari, became the President of Nigeria. The election was considered to be characterized with violence, vote buying, election irregularities and rigging and mostly under-age voting in some major parts of northern Nigeria (Soni, 2015). On the 21st of October, 2015, President Muhammadu appointed Prof. Mahmood Yakubu as chairman of INEC. To check electoral malpractices, Prof. Mahmood Yakubu, introduced the Smart Card Reader. Even with the adoption of the Smart Card Reader, his first election conducted in 2019 like many others in past years had high level of electoral malpractices in all the states in Nigeria. In February 25th, 2023, election was conducted for the Office of President, Senate and House of Representative. INEC later adopted the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BIVAS). The BIVAS was designed to transmit results via online to INEC Server. During the 2023 Presidential and General elections, the BIVAS failed to transmit results to INEC Server. INEC Prof. Mahmood Yakubu could not provide adequate reasons why the BIVAS failed to transmit results via online for Nigerians and the whole world to see. The 2023 general election like many past others was believed to be characterised by large scale of electoral frauds. This made the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the Labour Party challenged the elections in the court. Electoral problems in Nigeria are always central on the processes.

The above records showed that Nigeria had five Election Management Bodies since 1959. They were the Electoral Commission of the Federation (ECF) in 1964 and 1965 regional elections; the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) that conducted the transitional elections in 1979 and the controversial 1983 elections; the National Electoral Commission (NEC) that managed the three-year transition programme and ended with the annulled 1993 elections; the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON) that was established by General Sani Abacha to manage his transition programme, which was aborted after his death in 1998, and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) (Onwunyi, Victor & Mba, 2019).

In all these electoral developments, the practice of the electoral system in any country determines to some extent the need for electoral reform. Ebirim (2013) believes that the extent to which election advances democratic order depends in large part on the existing electoral system, its nature and its acceptance by the stakeholders in the electoral process. Jibrin (2010) argued that most controversy about election centred on the electoral system. This again explains a faulty electoral system. To Obah- Akpowoghaha (2013), electoral system refers to a complex of rules and regulations that govern the selection of officeholders in a democratic context. To him, the choice of a particular electoral system does not only have a profound effect on the political life of a country, it also distributes costs and benefits to political actors i.e. political parties and candidates. Nnoli (2003) as cited in Obah-Akpowoghaha (2013) notes that an electoral system encompasses procedures, rules and regulations for the electorate to exercise their right to vote and determines how elected MPs occupy their allocated seats in the legislature. For him, the procedures, rules and regulations governing elections are commonly defined by both national constitutions and specific electoral laws. To the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2009), electoral systems defined and structured the

rules of the political game; help determine who is elected, how a campaign is fought, the role of political parties, and most importantly, who governs. Furthermore, the choice of an electoral system can help to 'engineer' specific outcomes, such as to encourage cooperation and accommodation in a divided society. Hence, the importance of a suitable electoral reform in a developing country like Nigeria with diverse ethnic base cannot be overemphasized. In other words, electoral systems are the central political institution in representative democracies. It converts votes into seats and structure the choices facing voters. It also affects the behaviour of political parties, individual MPs, and candidates. Consequently, a country's electoral system is the technique used to measure the number of elected position in government that persons and political parties are awarded after elections (Ebirim, 2013).

As a result of the nature of election in Nigeria, many have called for electoral reform. Election is a very important process and exercise in choosing person or persons that will rule or govern the country or state or local government as the case in Nigeria or someone who will represent them in the affairs of the community or country. However, Animashau (2010) had observed that local and foreign election observer groups that have monitored various elections in Nigeria have always lamented over the irregularities and manipulation that attended elections. Many elections in the past and 2019 were marred by very poor organization, lack of essential transparency, widespread procedural inequalities, substantial evidence of fraud, widespread voter disenfranchisement at different stages of the process, lack of equal conditions for political parties and candidates and numerous incidents of violence. The situation accounts for the reason why effective political participation and equitable distribution of resources necessary for democratic governance are yet to actualise (Odeomelam, 2011). The implication is that unhealthy rivalry and stiff competition for political control of government has engendered electoral reform. A major reason behind all these forms of electoral malpractices is the quest for power by all means (Popoola, 2011), and this questioned the credibility of the democratic process and invariably posed serious challenges for the democratic practice in the country (Abbass, 2008).

In order to get the electoral system right, many Nigerians have suggested for electoral reform or restructuring. Electoral reform is necessary when the means to political power is faulty and substandard based on best practices in different parts of the world. In this case, the means to political power justifies the end. The end is always poor and bad governance. Some have called for E-voting system and complete independent of the electoral umpire. Nigerians believe that the system is bedeviled with so many problems including that the electoral umpire body (INEC) is not independent due to external interference (Obboh, 2016). There is government interference in the affairs and administration of INEC at the federal and state levels. For instance, the President appoints INEC national chairman while at the state level, the governor appoints INEC chairman. Appointments and funds are two things that made INEC weak and probably failed to conduct free and fair elections. The above collaborate the views of Omotola (2010), that the Electoral Body is characterised by ineffective administration at all stages and levels (before, during and after) elections, resulting in disastrously discredited outcomes. This is due largely to the weak institutionalization of the primary agencies of electoral administration, particularly the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the political parties. Omotola further stressed that INEC lacks both institutional and administrative autonomy, as manifested by its composition and funding by the presidency, as well as its gross lack of professionalism and security of tenure for its officials

When the political institutions that are instruments for election in a country are frailty, it invariably affects other institutions. This forms the need for electoral reform to strengthen the process to power, and thus, develop a vibrant political structure. Eme (2008) notes that the outcry for electoral reform made the late President Musa Yar'Adua's administration to set up Electoral Reform Committee in 2007 that later became Electoral Acts in 2010 by the presenting auspicious opportunity to the country to sincerely overhaul its electoral system.

After identifying the challenges facing the electoral processes and system, the committee urgently recommends among other things the establishment of an electoral offences commission to prosecute electoral offenders and the increased funding of INEC. By setting up an electoral committee, it implies the need for a reform in the electoral process and system. This problem alone serves as reason to research upon study of this nature. Electoral reform is adjudged to be meaningful if it improves the responsiveness of the electoral process to public desire and expectations (Eme, 2008). This is why Onwunyi, Victor, and Mba (2019) reasoned that the autonomy of electoral management body is an important pre-requisite for elections to be considered credible. However, Levenaar and Hazan (2011) believe that the process of electoral reform should be guided with these questions. Why does it occur? Who initiate the reform? When does it succeed or fail to pass the necessary obstacles? These questions imply that electoral reform was a result of a failed electoral system and structures. It also implies the need for reform.

Many studies have looked at electoral reform from different perspectives (Eme, 2008; Obakhedo, 2011; Levenaar & Hazan, 2011; Osinakachukwu, & Jawan, 2011; Ogwu, 2016; Shehu, Othman, & Osman, 2017; Sule, & Tal, 2018). However, studies have not adequately looked at the obligations of the mass media for electoral reform in Nigeria. Though there are similar studies on this subject (Ugulah & Erebi, 2008; Oboh, 2016; Olowojolu, 2016), for instance, Oboh (2016) argued that the Nigerian press being the Fourth Estate of the Realm has a duty to hold the government accountable for the conduct of elections. However, these studies are inadequate to make inference and draw conclusions on the subject matter. This current study seeks literature data to analyse the subject matter.

The mass media have played crucial role in elections and electoral reform since independence and till now. Specifically, the media have contributed immensely towards the enthronement of democracy. The study therefore among other things will contribute to the existing concepts, theories and practice on media and election. It will expand existing knowledge on electoral reform. This study in a broader perspective is part of the field of media and election. The main objectives of the study among other things centred on the roles of the media for electoral reform in Nigeria, and how these roles are imperatives for electoral reform. Also, how media obligations for electoral reform are challenged. Using a review of literature, the study intends to examine the expectations of the media in electoral reform. This paper is exploratory and explanatory in nature as it adopts analytical and qualitative research method. This method involves the gathering of relevant literature data, documents and records, with the sole aim of interpreting these data in order to achieve the desired objective of the study.

Theoretical Framework

There are numerous relevant theories that can be used in explaining and understanding media and electoral reform. However, the study was anchored on the theories of Rational Choice Theory and Media Framing Theory. Rational Choice Theory (RCT) originated in the 18th century with the work of Cesare Beccaria but the work was not popular until it was later developed by Anthony Downs in 1957 as an economic theory of democracy in explaining individual decision-making or behaviour as it connotes to microeconomic models and analysis. Later, Gary Becker became the early proponent of applying this theory to political science and sociology. The basic premise of this theory is that aggregate social behaviour results from the behaviour of individual actors, each of whom makes individual decision. The theory also focuses on the determinants of the individual choices. It explains the process of deciding what options are available for an individual and then choosing the most preferred one or option. In regard to electoral reform, Hazan and Leenaar (2012) maintain that changes in electoral reform are made as a result of the deliberately planned forecasts of elites to make and implement regulations and rules concerning elections in order to secure future elections, consolidate power and optimise political and electoral benefits.

In the view of Díez (2001), rational choice deals with preferences at the level of assumptions, by considering them as exogenous, and therefore largely ignoring the issue of preference formation; actors are rational and will invariably act to maximize their self-interest. More often than not, politicians are assumed to be not only rational thinkers but also short-term thinkers. For example, the electorates make choices based on immediate electoral calculations with little regard for, or understanding of, their probable long-term effects as many cases in Nigeria when politicians will no longer keep to their promises. This is a situation called Promise and Performance Paradigm (PPP) or gap. This is a gap or shift from what politician promised during campaigns and performance when voted into power. Rational choice theory makes individual electorate to make rational or calculated choice based on the promise and performance paradigm. The rational choice postulation gives 'power' to the electorates by reforming political arrangements that preserve the executive and legislative branches of government. The rational choice postulation can force those in power to accept unpalatable institutional changes.

Rational choice theory is based on the belief that the electorates have preferences and chose according to those preferred choice. Rational choice theory gives the electorates the mandate to choose the opposition party if the incumbents do not perform the expectations or needful. This was the case in Nigeria in the 2015 general elections when the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) was defeated by the main opposition, the All Progressive Congress (APC). The rational choice approach therefore lays much emphasis on voters' choice of their candidates in an election based on issues and policy design of the political parties (Sule & Tai, 2018). The authors believe that many electorates make decisions based on their immediate gains not on rational choice. In this wise, the rational choice theory in analysing electoral reform holds that the electorates are part of the reform processes even if the process to some extent is influence by politicians, the electorates' decision determine the choice of a candidate in a best practice election.

The concept of framing was first posited by Gregory Bateson in 1972 (Arowolo, 2017) and later by Goffman in 1974, as 'Frame Analysis' (Dorfman, & Krasnow, 2014). According to Arowolo (2017), framing describes the practice of thinking about news items and story content within familiar context. Framing is related to the agenda-setting tradition but expands the research by focusing on the essence of the issues at hand rather than on a particular topic. In fact, media farming is an extension of agenda-setting theory. While agenda-setting deals with what the reporter and editor should gate-keep, consider or present as news, media framing looks at all the angels of the news presented, time of the news, the degree of discussion given to the news, small salient areas could be invoked, and the prominence given to the news. It is indeed, how the news is framed. The basis of framing theory is that the media focuses attention on certain events and then places them within a field of meaning. It deals with how the media package and present information to the audience. According to Dorfman and Krasnow (2014), framing is the process of reconciling new information with one's existing understanding. Journalists in media framing decide which facts, values and perspectives will be given prominence. This means that reporters certainly apply their own perspectives and interpretative frames when packaging news.

Media framing as far as electoral reform is concerned aimed at drawing audience attention to certain attributes of the reform in the news coverage by making meaning from media message. Media framing is a strategy use of mass media to advance public concerns, debates and policy on national issues like electoral reform which became a national issue in 2010 during the formulation of the Electoral Acts. Electoral issues can be framed by the media for public discourse that when consistently and persistently discussed, it can become a working tool or framework for public policy. The basis of framing theory is that the media focused attention on certain issues and places importance on them. Media framing on electoral reform must be consistent to gain public acceptance. Consistent and persistent advocacy by media

framing are capable of influencing or inducing positive electorates change. Dorfman and Krasnow (2014) reasoned that media framing can be directed towards behaviour of the electorates in order to achieve free and fair elections. Because framing has the ability to alter the public's perception, politicians are interested in media framing. The essence is to make the electorates see things with them. Hence, the way electoral issues are framed or interpreted in the media reflect to some extent, who might win the election. Electorates can make their decisions based on the framing from the news media.

The theories of rational choice and that of media framing adopted for this study could be connected to the main objectives of the study. The main objectives centred on the obligations of the media for electoral reform in Nigeria, and how these roles are obligations for electoral reform. In the rational choice postulations, electorates make choice of political candidate to vote for, choice of political party or choice of the contents of the electoral reform and so on. As such, media framing influence the electorates' choice. Media framing not only interprets but help the electorates to see things the way they are. For example, when media reports on the legislatures, especially when they have conflict interests in the House like bills raised or sponsored, the judiciary on series of electoral cases and the executives displayed of supremacy, they make the audience to have a mind-set of the kind of people in power. That is, by consistently reporting on these political structures and other institutions like INEC, the media give framing, and the audience sees and accepts the framing they way the media presented them. Over time, media framing builds up beliefs, perception and attitude. This is in the light of the postulation that regular and consistent exposure to the mass media influences audiences' attitude, choice and perception. Media framing to some extent influence not only our perceptions but also choice in political and other national matters.

There are also various approaches adopted by researchers in the field of election to analyse and explain the concept of electoral reform (Diez, 2001; Eme, 2008; Renwick, 2010; Levenaar & Hazan, 2011). Diez (2001) had posited approaches in explaining electoral reform. She presented the maximization of legislative representation and the protection and furthering of politicians' political careers. To her, the maximization of legislative representation approach to electoral laws is the product of negotiations between incumbents and their opponents, each of whom is trying to maximize their legislative representation. This type of electoral reform comes from those who want to increase their strength and seats in the National Assembly. Again, this reform is a product of political party interest. It depends on the party leaderships' expectations about where their electoral strength lies. The second approach deals with protection and furthering of politicians' political careers. Diez argued that electoral law preferences are driven by the desire of politicians to protect and further their careers. For instance, politicians would do anything to vote against a bill that threatened to eliminate any reform or system or bill that would not favour them. This is done to further their political career. Politicians may input their interests in electoral reform.

Renwick (2010) for example, identified four major stakeholders that play strategic roles in electoral reform as: citizens, judges, politicians and external actors (International Non-Governmental Organisations and powerful states, etc.) with varying degrees of involvement and roles to play at the same or varying times. He also presented five range of both citizens and elite dominated electoral reform into: massive imposition of reform by the citizens which is independent of others whether internal or external; the public is mobilised and it then forces the politicians to accept and establish the reform; politicians go with popular opinion and institute the reform in line with popular desire; as well, politicians independently institute changes independent of or without other influence; and where the elites/politicians desire to institute or establish the reform but refrained by the fear of disconcerting public opinion. Renwick further raised three fundamental questions on elections and electoral reform as: first: who chooses the electoral system; what is the degree of political and politicians control of the election decision making processes; second, whose or what interest values do the chosen

electoral systems protect or give out; do the involved politicians serve their own selfish interests or the general and popular good for all; how and what electoral system changes are there to take place? He proposes two motives of electoral reform as those of 'power and value interests'. With power interest in which the politicians want to tactically and indirectly maximise their political powers and influence; and value interests in which the politicians strive to achieve the common good for all - accountable and popular leadership, credible election, etc.

In attempt to analyse electoral reform, Levenaar and Hazan (2011) have used an approach called systematic description and consequences of electoral system to described and better understand and explain electoral reform. The systematic description and consequences of electoral system approach in electoral reform is as a result of the weak and faulty electoral system. For instance, when the electoral system does not meet the aspirations and desires of many persons and it is surrounded by many problems, the consequences of the faulty system leads to change or reform. To them, electoral reform is the consequences of many factors namely the political parties system, electoral procedures, voting system, vote counting procedures and electoral act, which centred on attitude.

To Eme (2008), three approaches are universally adopted. They are the legal, political and administrative frameworks to the understanding of electoral reform. The legal framework involves the amendment of the constitution, the electoral laws and other related rules and regulations. The objective of this framework is to enhance the integrity, relevance and adequacy of the legal provisions in defense of the electoral system. The administrative framework covers new and better strategies, structures, policies procedures and technical innovations, better model of electoral staff recruitment, enhancement of accessibility to inform voting, and special consideration to the physically challenged electors. More significantly, this framework equally includes the introduction of new technology for voting, registration of voters; counting and security. The political approach argues for the autonomy of the electoral umpires to be widened, improved funding to guarantee its independence, efficiency and, accountability. However, Rahat and Hazan (2009) identified superiority of the executive arms of government over the others and the political actors' vested interests as barriers to electoral reform. All the approaches discussed implied that electoral reform is influenced by various factors seeking certain interests.

A Review of Related Literature

a. The Concept of Electoral Reform

As a way of definition, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA, 2014) policy paper on electoral law reform in Africa defines electoral reform as changes undertaken to improve the electoral process by promoting the electoral rights of citizens and by operationalizing key principles such as impartiality, inclusiveness, transparency, integrity and accuracy. To Abubakar and Yahaya (2017), electoral reform entail an overall change in the practices, ways and systems of the electoral business to improved means of consolidating on the mandates and desires of the voters in a country. This normally includes vast improvements in voting procedures, introduction of new technologies, and correction of electoral ills such as launching measures against bribery, ballot box/paper snatching and avoiding political conflicts of interests. Electoral reform avails a country an opportunity to restructure its fallen electoral nuisances and when not properly looked at, leads to high level political unrest far beyond control.

Complementing the above view, Shehu, Othman and Osman, (2017) see electoral reform as laws governing the conduct and management of elections with states plays the central roles. They believe that electoral reform are necessitated because of some irregularities and some key areas which need reform. Specifically, Eme (2008) sees electoral reform as a change in the

electoral process or system that is geared towards improving how the electors' desires are expressed in election results. These desired changes can bring about sound innovations and initiatives that can better the lots of the populace in terms of conducting free and fair elections and bringing culprits in election rigging to justice. Electoral reform, in the views of Eme covers electoral issues such as reforming the registration and voting systems, vote counting procedures; rules about political parties; eligibility to vote; how candidates and political parties get their names onto ballot papers; ballot design aid, voting equipment, political finance, safety of votes and electoral officers and agents, campaign and other factors which affects the rate of voter's participation among others. To Eme, electoral reform is the antidote to electoral fraud.

The need for electoral reform has always been as a result of conflicting issues from past conducted elections in Nigeria. A study has shown that the inadequacy of the existing legal framework and law harmonisation efforts and the failure of an election to deliver acceptable results, often coupled with allegations related to misconduct and fraud, and potential conflict emanating from disputed elections triggers for electoral reform (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, IDEA, 2014). In the same manner, another study had shown that the existence of weak democratic institutions, structures and processes, political culture, weak legal/institutional framework, and among other factors are responsible for the need for electoral reform (Aiyede, 2012). The author argued that constitutional, statutory, administrative and institutional changes in Nigerian political structure will bring about responsible electoral processes. To him, the electoral system must enhance the empowerment of citizens. Alahira-David; Abdullahi and Auwalu (2015) in their study have showed that the purpose of electoral reform in developing countries like Nigeria is in order to enhance fairness, accountability and integrity in the electoral system by strengthening the existing legal framework. Therefore, electoral reform is the process of bringing amendments to the electoral process.

Electoral reform in Nigeria can be seen as calls by the populace for change but sometimes subject to the dictates of the ruling party or ruling class or politicians. Renwick (2010) had argued that electoral system can be subjected to changes through several means, modes and by many different factors and circumstances just there are many stakeholders to the changes or reform processes. This corresponds with the view of Hazan and Lennar (2012) that electoral reform are popular issues depending on position as those in status quo may not favour electoral reform for the fact they are in power courtesy of the existing system which additionally protects and promotes their interests and those who are not in power and have not succeeded with the current system and therefore want reform for their advantages too or for the good of all. Shehu, Othman and Osman (2017) shared similar thoughts with Hazan and Lennar that a key issue that determines and influences politics of electoral reform is party interests. To them, electoral reform is characterised by constant reform without implementing the outcomes.

Electoral reform is not just act for the now but also a process with various issues. On this, Botchway and Kwarteng (2018) say that electoral reform usually include issues with regards to the regulation of political broadcasting, reform of legislative structures, the development of an independent electoral commission, the facilities for registering and voting, and the public funding of party campaigns. According to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA, 2016), electoral reform are broad terms that covers, among other things, improving the responsiveness of electoral processes to public desires and expectations. It, however, notes that "not all electoral change can be considered as electoral reform" and that "electoral change can only be referred to as reform if its primary goal is to improve electoral processes.

In the same vein, in his study of electoral reform and democratic stability in Nigeria, Ogwu (2016) revealed that electoral reform is a deliberate attempt made by government to correct identified weaknesses, irregularities or illegalities in the electoral process. He however

maintain that organized political structures, institutions, political culture, important determining factors for electoral process and democracy, and these factors, should not be ignored in the process of reform for the enhancement of democratization and development of Nigeria. In his submission of his study, Ogwu holds that “drastic changes are required in the electoral laws in Nigeria” (p.29). To Akinwale and Adeke (2019), electoral reform should start with political parties by conducting free, fair and transparent primaries. They believe that electoral reform starts from political parties’ primaries. Changes in electoral systems may give rise to strategic responses of voters and politicians in anticipation of the electoral systems. Brown (2013) writes that the political system in Nigeria is structured in a way that gives party superiority or that allows political parties become platforms on which the political class actualize the authoritative allocation of values.

Some studies believe that electoral reform is best implemented by national value system and responsible political behaviour (Ogwu, 2016; Sule & Tal, 2018). To Ogwu, a national value system is a prelude to meaningful democracy in Nigeria while Sule and Tal believe that political behaviour determines the conduct of election. The authors (Sule & Tal) examine how political behaviour and voting pattern in the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria determined the outcome of votes and the winner. They showed that political behaviour of the electorates during elections is believed to be based on their affinity with leaders that belong to the same religious groups, ethnic cleavages, region and other sentiments. The above implies that national value system and political behaviour are strong socio-political factors that affect our electoral structure, reform or system. Our national value system determines our political behaviour.

b. Media Obligations for Electoral Reform

Studies have highlighted various functions of the mass media for electoral reform. Media freedom is essential for electoral reform and the deepening of democracy (Bandipo, 2016), the role of the “fourth estate” is important during elections (Kerr & Lührmann, 2017) as well as media roles in electoral reform and democracy are obligations (Olowojolu, 2016). Olowojolu further asserts that the media have always been at the forefront of the agitation for electoral reform, reporting irregularities and malpractices that have long characterised the electoral processes in Nigeria. In their ‘watchdog’ role, Ashraf (2014) asserted that the media can play an important role to promote transparency, accountability, and public scrutiny of decision-makers, by highlighting policy failures, maladministration by public officials, corruption in the judiciary, and scandals in the corporate sector. In electoral reform and democratic structures, the media can also exposes maneuverings and abuses of fundamental human rights. The media also have a critical role to mediate between the state and citizens through the debates and discussions about the major issues of the day and informing people about the stand of their leaders on such issues. The overall functions of the media in time of electoral reform and to enhance democratic structures and institutions are to observe the activities of the state, and fearlessly expose exploitations of official authority; to speak for the people, represents the interests of the society, and serves as a check on the government.

In the nature of modern politics, it is impossible for politicians to reach all the voters in their constituencies and to solicit their support to win elections without the help of the media (Obboh, 2016). The author noted that the news media are now the modern platforms from which party candidates disseminate information to voters and solicit their support to win elections. The argument is that as politicians are seeking to shape and draw benefits from public opinion, so also it is that the mass media seek to maintain public attention and influence both the government and the citizens. He believes that the role of the media in electioneering campaign is to provide information on the registered parties—their programmes and candidates that would enable the citizens to decide on the party and candidates that they may wish to vote for during elections. Therefore, it is important that the media provide adequate

information on political candidates which would enable the people to cast their votes for the more deserving candidates in the elections, while the media thereafter support the government to implement its policy agenda for development (Oboh, 2016).

Research on how media freedom may structure citizens' trust in elections had been studied. Kerr and Lührmann (2017) study how autonomy of election management bodies (EMBs) and media freedom individually and conjointly shape citizens' trust in elections. Citizens are more likely to express confidence in elections when EMBs display de facto autonomy and less likely to do so when mass media disseminate information independent of government control. They argued that citizens' ability to make election quality judgments is a function of the quantity and quality of information that they receive about the electoral process. Following this, when media freedom is high, citizens are more likely to become aware of electoral manipulation and therefore less likely to express confidence in elections when compared to countries where media freedom is restricted. To Botchway and Kwarteng (2018), electoral reform can not take place without the support of its key stakeholders: the government, the legislature, the political parties and the mass media. They argued that reform must create an enabling environment that will support the organization of elections in a free, fair and transparent manner. Again electoral reform must also create an effective platform to resolve grievances for candidates who lost the elections or have any issues that need to be addressed. It should also enhance the chances of all eligible voters to cast their votes without fear of intimidation and threats of any form. The media are needed in all these.

Media freedom is obligation for electoral reform and enhancing political structures and institutions in Nigeria. Bowler, Brunell, Donovan, and Gronke (2015) conceptualize media freedom as the ability of media entities to collect and publicly disseminate political and official information, independent of government control or interference. To Kerr and Lührmann (2017), media freedom is most clearly demonstrated when media entities routinely monitor and publicly criticize government activity. Consequently, if media lack independence, citizens are less likely to be exposed to elite interpretations that may reveal information about electoral manipulation, including attempts to undermine the quality of election management bodies, bribe voters, or stifle opposition candidates. In short, if media are biased in favor of the incumbent, voices criticizing the quality of elections are less likely to be reflected, and consequently citizens are less likely to become aware of electoral manipulation. This may result in relatively favourable views about the quality of elections. The reverse is also true. When mass media exercise greater freedom from government control, interpretations of election quality become more pluralistic, and in contexts where manipulation occurs or is alleged to have occurred, citizens are more likely to gain knowledge about it. This knowledge could potentially influence the process through which citizens form judgments about the quality of elections.

In all, media freedom and appreciation of our national values are fundamentally obligation for electoral reform.

Submission

Having consulted and analysed different empirical and non-empirical data on the subject matter, and as a way of presenting the points discussed so far, the researcher upon the first objective of the study on the role of the media on electoral reform submits, that:

- The mass media are significant for electoral reform because they provide essential information about our political system and development.
- The roles played by the media over the years on elections led to election reform in Nigeria. The media have played significant roles, and they are still playing.
- The media have been the advocates of electoral reform, peaceful elections and good governance.

- It is difficult for the political and ruling class to run the political structures and institutions in the county and engage in electoral matters without the mass media.
- The ruling class knows the strength of the media to influence the electorates for reform hence; they try to control it through press laws and other undemocratic forms.

Having these significant roles in mind, it is expected therefore that:

- Electoral reform should start with the political parties, that is, intra-party reform
- Electoral reform should be determined by the electorates not the political class. Political parties and the politicians are the biggest challenge in electoral reform.
- Our political structures and institutions are weak and this affects the electoral system. There is need therefore to strengthen these structures.
- More focus should be on the electorates' behaviour than the electoral reform and Electoral Acts.
- Responsible electoral attitude is the best electoral reform.

Upon the second objective of the study on how the media roles are imperatives for electoral reform, the media should be:

- Regular in reporting electoral matters.
- Giving political education on electoral matters to the electorates.
- Criticizing the government's electoral process and reform not in conformity with the aspirations and needs of the people.
- Criticizing political parties and politicians on electoral issues that do not conformed to the aspirations and needs of the people.
- Presenting the views of the people through opinion poll.
- Setting agenda and framing for electoral reform and democratic political structures.
- Exposing electoral malpractice and irregularities by political parties.
- Projecting the expectations of the people in electoral reform
- Projecting the rule of law and good governance in the political structures

Upon the third objective of the study on how media obligations for electoral reform are challenged

S/ N	The media are challenged by:	Implications/Indications
1.	Poor funding by the owner	Poor reportage
2.	Owner's policy and interference	A challenge to objective reporting. The Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) has federal government interference
3.	Government censorship with media law	Media are controlled by authoritarian government
4.	Inadequate focus on electoral reform matters	Limited information to electoral news
5.	Attacks and threats on journalists	Denial of freedom of information and right to news
6.	Poor incentives to carry investigative journalism on politics	The truth remains in the dark
7.	Arrest of journalists by security operatives	An indication of authoritative and oppressive government
8.	Restriction on access to vital information	The truth again, remains in the dark
9.	Lack of modern digital	This result to poor coverage

- communication technology to aid
journalists
10. Politicians and political parties funding some media houses Media become tools for political interests and personal aggrandizements. States radio and television stations across Nigeria, AIT and NTA are examples.
 11. Lack of objectivity in political news stories An indication of 'unpopular' media.
 12. Editor's might or gatekeeping The truth may be held hostage.
- Source: Author's analysis

Conclusion

Electoral reform has become an important issue in the political and electoral development in Nigeria. Reasons for electoral reform in Nigeria were because of weak political structures and electoral malpractices, characterised by various forms of electoral manipulations, violence, snatching of ballot papers and boxes, duplication of ballot papers; assassination and assassination attempt, threat to lives, ethnic and religious rivalries, intimidation, and so on. In all these, the media have been not just a watching dog but also a barking dog. Therefore, the mass media are significant for electoral reform because they provide essential information about our political system and development. The ruling class knows the strength of the media to influence the electorates and change their opinion, hence; they ensure they have their ways in electoral processes through the media. It is expected therefore, that electoral reform should start with the political parties. However, the media should advocate for behaviour reform. This is believed to be the best electoral reform. There is need for other researcher (s) to look at Electorate's Behavioural Reform.

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