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PARTISAN PRESS: EXAMINING THE ROLE OF THE PRESS IN NIGERIA'S ELECTORAL PROCESS BETWEEN 1922 AND 1966

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Abstract

This qualitative study employs a historical case study approach to trace the origin of the symbiotic relationship between the press and the electoral process in Nigeria today, focusing on involvement of early newspapers in elections and electoral campaigns from 1922 to 1966. The study investigates the role of the press in shaping public opinion, influencing, electoral outcomes, and the country's electoral process in general. Through review of historical records and works of other scholars on the subject matter, this study reveals the significant impact of the press on Nigeria's electoral process during the colonial and early independence era. Using elite theory to examine how publishers of early newspapers used the press to propagate their political interests, the study focuses on activities of early Nigerian nationalists and political elites to illustrate the press's influence on electoral outcomes and the democratic process during the period. The findings of this study highlight the press's crucial role in shaping public opinion, mobilizing political support, and promoting political actors during election periods. The study also establishes how the press's involvement in the early days of electioneering laid the

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foundation for the media's current influence on the electoral process in Nigeria by exploring the historical context of the press's relationship with the electoral process. The study's insights are relevant to understanding the ongoing challenges and opportunities facing Nigeria's democratic process and the role of the media in shaping the country's democratic future.

Introduction

Background to the Study

The Nigerian press has continued to play significant roles in shaping the country's electoral process since the colonial era. Following the introduction of elective principle to Nigeria by the 1922 constitution of Sir Hugh Clifford, some Nigerian nationalists established newspapers and used those publications to propagate their political interests. According to Ikiebe (2017), the early Nigerian press, comprising newspapers such as the Nigerian Pioneer, Lagos Weekly Record, and the West African Pilot, emerged as a powerful force in the country's struggle for independence and democratic governance. He explains that these newspapers not only provided a platform for nationalist voices but also played a crucial role in mobilizing public opinion and influencing electoral outcomes. The press's involvement in the early days of electioneering in Nigeria laid the solid foundation for the roles of media in the country's elections and electoral campaigns today. This position is corroborated by Aghamalu (2013:154), who notes that the history of election and electoral campaigns in Nigeria cannot be told without references to the roles of early press.

The media's influence on Nigeria's electoral process has been shaped by the historical context of early electioneering experience in the country. Oladeji (2016) cited in Abegunrin (2025) explains that after confronting Nigerian nationalists for demanding representative government, Clifford turned around to introduce elective principle into the Nigerian political system through the 1922 constitution, which established a legislative council that was composed of forty-six members. He explains further that members of the council were made up of twenty-seven official members, including the governor himself, and nineteen unofficial members, and that four of the unofficial members were to be elected through a limited franchise system, while fifteen (including ten Africans) were to be nominated by the governor. Three of the elected members were to represent Lagos and the remaining one to represent Calabar. That was the origin of electoral contests in Nigeria.

Nwalie (2025) maintains that some of the nationalists of the time took the advantage to establish the first set of political parties in the country for the purpose of sponsoring candidates into the legislative council, with the Nigeria National Democratic Party (NNDP)

as the first political party in Nigeria. These nationalists also established newspapers to serve as mouthpieces of their political parties. Ifoh and Amodu (2024) note that most of the newspapers of the period were partisan, and most of the things they published only promoted the political interests of their publishers. This marked the beginning of the Nigerian media being used to shape public opinion and mobilize support for politicians during election periods in Nigeria. Nwalie (2025) explains that nine candidates contested the 1923 election, out of which three were NNDP members, one was a member of People's Choice, and five other were independent candidates. According to him, NNDP won all the seats, and this pattern continued in the 1928 and 1933 elections, until 1938 when the Nigeria Youth Movement (NYM) defeated NNDP and won all the three Lagos seats.

Ifoh and Amodu (2024) observe that the pre-independence period witnessed a surge in political activities and electoral contests, with the press playing a leading role. Also, in the years that followed, the Nigerian press continued to play a significant role in shaping the country's electoral process. During the 1951 elections, which marked a major milestone in Nigeria's march towards self-governance, the press provided extensive coverage of the campaigns and outcomes. Newspapers such as the Daily Service and the West African Pilot provided a platform for politicians to express their views and mobilize support (Omu 1978 cited in Ikiebe, 2017). Similarly, the 1959 elections, which paved the way for Nigeria's independence in 1960, saw the press playing an even more significant role. The newspapers provided extensive coverage of the campaigns, and their editorials and commentaries influenced public opinion and shaped the electoral outcome (Bamiduro, 1983). Ahead of Nigeria's independence, the newspapers served as the major weapon used by the nationalists turned politicians to gain and consolidate political power (Ifoh and Amodu, 2024; Olayiwola, 1991:4).

In the same vein, the press was actively involved in the 1964/1965 parliamentary elections, which were the first elections held in post-independence Nigeria (IRIAD, 2021). During the First Republic, the focus of the Nigerian press shifted from nationalism to political propaganda. This was because of the fact that many of the nationalists, who used their newspapers to fight vehemently against colonialism, became the political leaders of the newly independent state (Mordi, 2018). The Northern People's Congress (NPC), Action Group (AG), and the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) massively used newspapers for election purposes during the polls (Mordi, 2018). The result of the elections was a victory for NPC, who won 162 out of the 312 seats (IRIAD, 2021).

This paper, therefore, offers a historical perspective to the relationship between the Nigerian press and the electoral process, with the main objective of explaining the reason the media play significant roles in election and electoral campaign in the country up till today. By examining the role of the press in Nigeria's electoral history, this paper argues

that the involvement of the press in the early days of electioneering in the country laid the solid foundation for the media's current influence on the electoral process.

Statement of the Problem

The Nigerian media has historically been a significant player in the country's political landscape, with its involvement in the electoral process dating back to the colonial era. However, this involvement has often been marked by controversy, with many other stakeholders and critics accusing the media of contributing to the collapse of the First and Second Republics. Since the introduction of elective principle to Nigeria during colonial era, the press has continued to play the roles of shaping public opinion and influencing electoral outcomes. Despite the country's transition to independence and subsequent democratic governance, the media's involvement in Nigerian electoral process has remained a contentious issue. The press has often been accused of partisanship and manipulation, which has undermined its credibility and raised concerns about its impact on the electoral process. It is noteworthy that the legacies of the early Nigerian press involvement in the electoral process significantly shaped the country's media landscape today. It laid the foundation for the roles the Nigerian media are playing in coverage and reportage of elections and election campaigns in this ongoing Fourth Republic.

Meanwhile, the historical role of the Nigerian press in the electoral process has received inadequate scholarly attention, despite its significance in shaping the country's political trajectory. There is a need to critically examine the early press involvement in electoral contests in Nigeria, and its consequences on the media landscape and electoral process in the country. This study examines the historical role of the Nigerian press in the electoral process, with a view to establishing a link between the past and present involvement of the Nigerian media in electoral contests in the country. Specifically, it seeks to investigate how the involvement of early press in the Nigeria's electoral process shaped the country's current media landscape and informed its contemporary role in democratic governance.

Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study is to critically examine the role of the early Nigerian press in the electoral process from 1922 to 1966, and how it laid the foundation for the involvement of the media in elections and electoral campaigns in Nigeria up till today.

Methodology

The study employed a qualitative historical case study design to examine the role of the press in Nigeria's electoral process from 1922 to 1966. The research made use of secondary sources of data, including historical records, academic journals, books, and other scholarly

works that focused on the subject matter. The use of secondary sources was justified by the need to contextualize the historical role of the press in Nigeria's electoral process and to draw on the insights and analyses of other scholars who have studied the subject matter.

The data collection process involved a systematic review of relevant literature on the history of the Nigerian press, electoral politics, and democratic development. The researcher consulted various academic databases, libraries, and archives to identify relevant sources, including books, journal articles, theses, and government publications that focused on involvement of Nigerian press in the electoral process from 1922 to 1966. The data analysis involved a thematic and interpretive approach, where the researcher identified patterns, themes, and trends in the literature on the role of the press in Nigeria's electoral process during the period of our study. The analysis was guided by the research objective, which focused on understanding the historical context, the role of the early Nigerian press in Nigeria's electoral process, and its implications for roles currently being played by the media during election periods in the country.. The study's validity and reliability were ensured through the use of multiple sources, triangulation of data, and peer review of the research process. This was because the researcher acknowledged the limitations of relying on secondary sources and the potential biases of the original authors.

The Concepts of Election, Electoral Process and Electoral Campaign

Election is at the very heart of democracy. This is because, democracy, as being practiced today, is first and foremost a system of government in which citizens freely chose those who will represent and govern them. The implication of this is that election is the only means of power transition and legitimization in democracy. This position is corroborated by Oni, Erameh and Oladejo, (2017), who declares that elections are the lifeline for stable democratic system. It has been established that only credible and transparent elections guarantee smooth and peaceful transition of political power, while the failure to conduct elections that will be acceptable to all stakeholders will hinder the peaceful interchange of government and the democratic consolidation (Oni, Erameh and Oladejo, 2017). No doubt, the issue of election management is very sensitive in any democratic society, especially in developing democracies. Election remains an essential ingredient in democracy, as it is the means through which those in positions of authority derive legitimacy from the people.

Aniekwu and Kushie (2011) maintain that election refers to the process through which the electorate determine who to represent them and who to be saddled with the responsibility of managing the affairs of the state based on their perceived conviction on

the credibility and capability of such people. According to Oni (2016), election is the most popular means through which people attain political power in modern political system (democracy). It gives the governed the opportunity to cast votes for their preferred political parties and candidates among different alternatives. He explains further that election "provides platforms for debates, persuasion and common rules for the electorate to choose those who will occupy elective positions in both the legislative and executive arms of the government'.

Scholars have established the centrality of elections in democratic governance and the critical roles that media play in ensuring a credible electoral process. According to Aiyede (2016), elections are the major instrument of democratic stability and development. Elections are important means through which those exercising political power derive legitimacy from the citizenry. Therefore, credible elections are necessary conditions for democratic stability, especially in emerging democracies.

Electoral process refers to the stages and procedure involved in organizing and conducting successful elections in a democracy. It is used to describe the procedure through which elections are conducted and people are elected into elective political offices in a country. Electoral process includes steps taken in organizing election of people into public offices, and these steps are usually coordinated by the electoral body and supported by other stakeholders in the country. Reynolds et al., (2005) cited in Ajagba, Gberevbie and Agbu (2020) argue that electoral process refers to the procedure through which voting of political parties and candidates into the country's legislature and other political offices is carried out. The steps usually involved in the electoral process of any democratic society include; registration of eligible voters, nomination of candidates by political parties, electoral campaigns, voters' education, voting, declaration of results and election petition.

According to Elekwa (2008), the term "electoral process" refers to a series of steps that include pre- and post-election activities such as voter registration, political party registration, constituent delineation, voter registration review, election dispute resolution, returning elected representatives to office, and oath-taking of newly elected public office holders. Without credible and acceptable electoral process, democracy cannot thrive in any society. This apparently is the reason Osakue and Oyakemeagbegha (2022) declare that electoral process is the fulcrum of democracy. They maintained that a credible electoral process is like the lifeblood required to keep democracy alive and growing in any society, citing the EU Election Observation Mission (2015), which states that the electoral process includes the rules that guide the conduct of elections and important activities that make up an electoral process.

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The above position is corroborated by Oni, Erameh and Oladejo (2017) who note that electoral process can be seen as the process of arriving at free and fair selection of candidates to fill elective political offices, and that such activities necessarily involve well-coordinated actions from all stakeholders, for democracy to be sustained and consolidated. Without these activities being well coordinated and managed, the electoral process will be meaningless, as the electorate (public) will not have trust and confidence in the process that produces those who will rule over them. Stressing the importance of public trust on the electoral system, Oyekanmi (2023) opines that it will be difficult to have a working democracy without a credible electoral process based on institutional frameworks that will guarantee its acceptability to all stakeholders in the political system. Meanwhile, ensuring credible and acceptable electoral process remains a major challenge confronting most of developing democracies, especially in Africa (Ntiwunka, Ayodele, and Kupoluyi, 2020). In Nigeria, there have been series of efforts towards the attainment of a credible electoral process that will be acceptable to all stakeholders. Consequently, the Nigerian government has initiated and implemented series of electoral reforms in recent time (Oyekanmi, 2023). This is in line with the suggestion of Muhammad and Osman (2023), that the survival and consolidation of democracy can best be achieved through a credible and transparent electoral process. According to Agbaje (1998) cited in Oyekanmi (2023: 78), elections are the bedrocks of all democratic practices, and a credible electoral process is one of the veritable means of nurturing and consolidating nascent democracies.

Electoral campaigns offer the opportunity for citizens to engage with political candidates and political parties. It is a crucial aspect of the electoral process in a democracy. Electoral campaigns refer to the organized efforts by political candidates, political parties or groups to persuade voters to support their cause. According to Aiyede (2016), electoral campaigns are a crucial component of democratic processes, allowing citizens to participate in the selection of their leaders and shape the direction of their country. It should be noted that electoral campaigns are primarily to sell political parties' manifestoes to the electorate, inform citizens about candidates' policies, mobilize support for candidates and parties in elections, and shape public opinions. Oyekanmi (2023) explains that electoral campaigns provide platforms for candidates to articulate their vision and plans, enabling voters to make informed decisions at polls.

Aiyede (2016) notes that there are various types of electoral campaigns, adding that these include; issue-based campaigns, personality-driven campaigns, and party-focused campaigns. He, however, asserts that issue-based campaigns are more effective in engaging voters and promoting democratic participation.

Expectedly, there have been constant efforts to ensure a credible electoral process that will be acceptable to all stakeholders in Nigeria since the commencement of the on-going Fourth Republic on May 29, 1999. Following a series of irregularities and violence that characterised the 2003 and 2007 general elections, attentions of stakeholders were drawn to the need to reform and strengthen Nigeria's electoral system. The late Nigerian President Umoru Musa Yar'Adua made significant strides in this direction when he declared his willingness to change the nation's electoral system and openly acknowledged that the 2007 presidential election that had installed him was rigged. As promised, on August 28, 2007, Yar'Adua established the Justice Muhammad Uwais electoral reform committee and tasked it with coming up with recommendations for strengthening the Nigerian election system (Aiyede, 2011).This was the nation's first significant attempt in the ongoing Fourth Republic to improve the electoral system. Olakanmi (2013) asserts that the Justice Uwais report on electoral reform was a turning point in the endeavour to enhance the way Nigerian elections are conducted under this administration. The most recent of these initiatives was the Electoral Act 2022, which was signed on February 25, 2022, by President Muhammadu Buhari. Some of the shortcomings of the Electoral Act 2010 were addressed by the Electoral Act 2022.

It is important to note that since the Fourth Republic of Nigeria began on May 29, 1999, the media has actively supported calls for electoral reforms in the country. The media's contributions to maintaining and promoting the electoral process's culture of fairness and transparency in Nigeria have drawn attention (Nosa, 2019). This corroborated the earlier position of Danjuma (2013) who claims that the media are in the forefront in the struggle to establish the conditions necessary to strengthen Nigeria's democracy in this ongoing Fourth Republic. Expectedly, during election periods, emphasis is placed on the media's ability to advocate, educate, and mobilise as the fourth estate of the realm. The media are expected to serve as a link between the electorate and the electoral process by disseminating adequate and accurate information needed to mobilise the electorate.

Theoretical Framework (Elite Theory)

The Elite theory describes power relationships in societies The theory was popularized by sociologists like Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca, Robert Michels and Ortega Gasset (Aliyu, Ahmed and Etim, 2023). The theory suggests that a small group of people, typically from the economically dominant class, hold significant power in the society. According to the Elite Theory (C. Wright Mills, 1956), power is usually concentrated in the hands of a small, elite group of individuals who shape societal decisions and outcomes. The theory suggests that media are not neutral institutions, but rather reflect the interests of the dominant elite in the society. According to Aliyu, Ahmed and Etim (2023), this theory is

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based on the assumption that every society has two classes: the ruling elite and the masses or non-elite class.

In the context of Nigeria's colonial and early independence era, the press reflected the interests of the educated Nigerian elite who established newspapers with the aim of using them to advance their political interests and shape public opinion on key issues, including electoral politics (Omu, 1978). This view is corroborated by Akinfeleye (1985), who notes that the Nigerian press has its roots in the colonial era, when a small group of educated Nigerians established newspapers to propagate their political views and interests. These early newspapers were instrumental in shaping public opinion and mobilizing support for the nationalist movement, which sought to end colonial rule and establish an independent Nigerian state (Nwalie, 2025).

Elite Theory suggests that the media, including newspapers, play a crucial role in shaping public discourse and influencing societal outcomes. This explains why the establishment of newspapers by few educated Nigerians during the colonial era was a strategic move to advance their political interests and shape public opinion (Ifoh and Amodu, 2024). These individuals were part of a small, privileged group that had access to Western education and were able to use this education to mobilize support for their political causes. The newspapers they established were used to propagate their ideologies, mobilize support, and shape public opinion on key issues, including the nationalist movement and electoral politics (Akinfeleye, 1985).

The educated Nigerian elite apparently used their newspapers to advance their interests and shape the country's political trajectory between the period of our study (Omu, 1978). The early Nigerian newspapers were instrumental in shaping public opinion and influencing electoral outcomes in Nigeria's early elections, including the 1951 and 1959 elections (Akinfeleye, 1985).

The implications of Elite Theory for understanding the Nigerian press's role in shaping public opinion and influencing electoral outcomes are significant. The theory, therefore, provides a useful framework for understanding the Nigerian press's role in shaping public opinion and influencing electoral outcomes during the colonial and early independence era. The theory suggests that the press was a key institution that reflected the interests of the educated Nigerian elite who established them. The press's ability to shape public opinion and mobilize support for the nationalist movement was a key factor in Nigeria's transition to independence (Ikiebe, 2017).

Origin of Relationship Between Media and Election in Nigeria

According to Aghamalu (2013:154), the history of election and electoral campaigns in cannot be told without references to the roles of media. This is because there seems to

be a close relationship between media and election in Nigeria, right from the time when the Clifford constitution of 1922 introduced elective principle to the country for the first time. Therefore, the symbiotic relationship that exists between media and election in Nigeria has its roots in the political activities of early Nigerian nationalists and political elites between 1922 and 1966. An empirical review of the roles played in the Nigerian electoral process by the media during the colonial era and First Republic is attempted.

Media and Election in Pre-Independent Nigeria

Ensuring credible elections requires robust media that can provide access to diverse shades of opinions and information that will enable the citizens to make informed choices at polls, ensure that stakeholders in the electoral process play according to the rules and ensure that those elected into political offices are accountable to the people (Muhammad and Osman, 2023). The media are expected to disseminate information that will equip the electorate with the knowledge about the reputation and credibility of politicians in order to arrive at rational choices at polls. This apparently is the reason the Nigerian media is characterised by a long tradition of active involvement in the political process in the country, especially during election periods. Aghamalu (2013:154) notes that Nigerian media have always been used for voters education; dissemination of information about political parties, politicians and the electoral process; mobilisation over voters (campaigns); and election monitoring. Since its inception, the Nigeria media have given adequate attention to political activities in the country, as they consider this as one of their primary responsibilities.

The close relationship between media and election in Nigeria dated back to the colonial period. It is a known fact that there were no elections in the pre-colonial Nigeria, as majority of the kingdoms and empires that were later merged to form the territorial society called Nigeria today were ruled over by monarchs. It was the 1922 constitution of Sir Hugh Clifford that introduced elective principle to Nigeria for the very first time. After confronting Nigerian nationalists for demanding representative government, Clifford turned around to introduce elective principle into the Nigerian political system through the 1922 constitution, which established a legislative council that was composed of forty-six members. Members of the council were made up of twenty-seven official members, including the governor himself, and nineteen unofficial members. Meanwhile, four of the unofficial members were to be elected through a limited franchise system, while fifteen (including ten Africans) were to be nominated by the governor. Three of the elected members were to represent Lagos and the remaining one to represent Calabar.

Political parties naturally formed once the elective principle was introduced in the 1922 constitution (Nwanlie, 2025). According to Akanji (2018), nationalists and political elites of

the time took the advantage of the constitution to establish political parties. Chief H.O. Davies and Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe founded the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM), Herbert Macaulay founded the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), and Chief Obafemi Awolowo founded the National Council of Nigerians and Cameroons (NCNC), which subsequently became the Action Group (AG). Oladeji (2016) cited in Abegunrin (2025) notes that the nationalists turned politicians, who were instrumental to the establishment of the first set of political parties in Nigeria, also established newspapers such as: Lagos Daily News (1925 by Herbert Macaulay); West African Pilot (1937 by Azikwe); and Nigerian Tribune (1948 by Obafemi Awolowo). These newspapers apart from being used in the struggle against colonialism, were also deployed to propagate the newly formed political parties, especially during election periods. Adedayo (2010) explains how Awolowo used the Nigerian Tribune to challenge the Northern political hegemony and to make Acton Group a household name in Southwest Nigeria.

There were several occurrences between 1930s and 1950s that clearly indicated the partisanship of the Nigerian media and their active involvement in the country's electoral politics during the period. According to Ikiebe (2017), the media (press) began to have strong influence on public discourse during the period. He explains that at the early stage of electoral politics in Nigeria, the media played roles that significantly shaped the character of Nigeria media and politics up till today. The nationalist press was gradually dragged into ethno-partisan politics as it became a weapon for electoral politics. In their quest to sell the political parties to the electorate, the newspapers promoted ethnicity to become a dominant factor in Nigeria's elections. During the period, the media evidently contributed to the ethno-political culture that has ever since continued to shape the conduct of elections in Nigeria. The nationalists turned politicians used their newspapers to promote themselves and their newly founded political parties; and also to fight against their real or imagined political opponents, especially during election periods

According to Nwalie (2025), in the 1923 election, nine candidates contested for the three seats in Lagos, three were members of NNDP; one was member of People's Choice, while five others were independent candidates. He maintains that NNDP won all the three seats in Lagos, adding that this pattern continued in the 1928 and 1933 elections, until when Nigerian Youths Movement (NYM) defeated NNDP and won all the Lagos seats in 1938.

Olayiwola (1991:4) notes that in the campaigns for the 1953 elections, the Nigerian newspapers of the period openly identified with certain political parties. According to him, The Record was pro-NNDP, The Advocate was anti-NNDP, The Tribune was pro-Action Group, while The Pilot was pro-NCNC. These newspapers were used to propagate the political parties and facilitated their penetration into the provinces. According to

Olayiwola (1991:4), the newspapers served as the major weapon used by the nationalists turned politicians to gain and consolidate political power.

The most prominent journalists of the period were also leaders of emerging political parties. For instance, the publisher of Weekly Records, Thomas Jackson, and publisher of Lagos Daily News, Herbert Macaulay, were behind the establishment of the first political party –NNDP- and they used their newspapers to promote the party. Ikiebe (2017) maintains that for about twenty-five years after its establishment, NNDP dominated and won almost all elections conducted during the period. Similarly, two other newspapers – the Nigerian Spectator and the Nigerian Advocate – were established during the period for election purposes (Omu, 1978 cited in Ikiebe, 2017). The emergence of politically active professional groups and influential pressure groups, whose members served as opinion leaders in their various communities during the period, greatly assisted in ensuring that information published in these newspapers got across to the public. Such groups included; the Lawyers Association, the Nigeria Teachers Union and the Railway Workers Union. During the 1959 general elections, there were institutional violence, thuggery and election manipulation.

Media and Elections During the First Republic in Nigeria

Consequent upon the promotion of ethnicity for political contestations by the media in pre-independent Nigeria, the major political parties that contested elections during the First Republic in the country were formed with ethnic and regional colorations. The Northern Peoples's Congress (NPC) represented the interest of the Hausa/Fulani dominated Northern Nigeria; the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) represented the interest of the Igbo people of Eastern Nigeria; while the Action Group (AG) was majorly the political party of the Yoruba people of Western Nigeria (Alakija, 2016). These political parties controlled the affairs of their respective regions, and during the 1959 federal elections conducted in preparation for Nigeria's independence, the three major parties won majority of parliamentary seats in their respective regions, but none of them was strong enough to form a national government. Consequently, the NPC and NCNC formed a coalition government, while the AG served as opposition political party. Alakija (2016) explains that Sir Abubarka Tafawa Balewa from the North emerged as the Prime Minister, while Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe from the East was the Governor-General and later Ceremonial President.

During the First Republic, the focus of the Nigerian media shifted from nationalism to political propaganda. This was because of the fact that many of the nationalists, who used their newspapers to fight vehemently against colonialism, became the political leaders of the newly independent state (Akanji, 2018). For example, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the

publisher of the Nigerian Tribune, became the Premier of the Western area, and Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe, the publisher of the West African Pilot, became the Premier of the Eastern region and eventually the first and only Nigerian Ceremonial President. The 1964/1965 parliamentary elections, which were the first set of elections conducted in post-independence Nigeria were covered by highly partisan press, and the result of the election was a victory for the Northern People's Congress (NPC), which won 162 out of the 312 seats in the Federal House of Representatives.

These nationalists –turned- politicians used their newspapers to propagate their parties and political ambitions during the 1964/1965 parliamentary election. These newspapers promoted ethnicity as the basis for political contestations. Consequently, series of crises and massive rigging were witnessed during the elections. Bamiduro (1983) explained that members of different political parties intimidated and harassed one another during election campaigns, and newspapers of the time apparently took sides in the political battles. As the election results were being rolled out by the electoral commission, there were accusations and counter accusations from political parties, rejecting election results that did not favour them, and these were echoed by newspapers that served as their 'mouthpiece'. Therefore, the credibility of the entire electoral process and the government produced by its outcomes were rubbished with the help of the ethnic and partisan newspapers (Bamiduro, 1983). As a result of this, there were widespread riots and demonstrations which led to the death of many Nigerians, destruction of properties across the country and eventual collapse of the First Republic.

Ikiebe (2017) laments that many of the daily and weekly newspapers in Nigeria during the First Republic were obviously politically biased. According to him, most of these newspapers were private newspapers owned by politicians and their publications were greatly influenced by the political affiliations of their proprietors. These papers were seen as the extension of the political parties, and some of the journalists on the payrolls of these media organizations were card- carrying members or sympathizers of the political parties. According to Ifoh and Amodu(2024), these politically-motivated newspapers contributed to heating up of the polity with the manner of their reportage of political activities during the First Republic in Nigeria. Realizing the effectiveness of the media in political communication and electoral politics, prominent politicians of the time struggled to get control of newspapers to propagate their political parties and political careers. A very good instance was the establishment of Daily Sketch by the government of Western Region under the Premiership of Chief Samuel Ladoke Akintola, during the political crisis between him and his estranged political leader - Chief Awolowo.

Ogunyemi (2013) notes that political undertone surrounded the establishment of the Daily Sketch newspaper. According to him, during the intra-party crisis within the AG, virtually

all the newspapers in Western Region, including Awolowo's Nigerian Tribune, turned against the Premier. For instance, the Daily Express showed partisanship and took side with Chief Awolowo during the leadership crisis (Mordi, 2018). He further explained that Daily Express' reportage of political activities during the period was greatly influenced by the close relationship between Chief Awolowo and those who controlled the editorial policy of the newspaper. He explained that the media apparently took side in the crisis to the extent that it seemed to be a deliberate strategy of the media and their collaborators to misrepresent the Akintola's side of the Western Region crisis and his disagreement with Chief Awolowo.

Chief Akintola, being a lawyer and former journalist, knew the importance of newspaper in Nigerian politics of the time, and subsequently established the Western region government owned Daily Sketch to propagate his administration, which somehow did not enjoy legitimacy among majority of the people of the region. The Sketch newspaper was founded by the Western regional government on 2nd of December, 1964 under the Akintola's watch as the Premier. Mordi (2018) explains that the ethno-regional parties of the period had deployed the newspapers they published or funded and controlled to weep up public sentiments in favor of themselves during the 1962 AG crisis and the subsequent 1965 Western Region parliamentary election, which was massively rigged to stop power from passing on to the UPGA, which considered the election as "do or die". According to him, the internal leadership crisis within the AG was a major test on the credibility of the Nigerian press during the First Republic, but the press failed to prove itself as a neutral and unbiased stakeholder in the country's democratic process during the period.

Mordi (2018) declares that how the press performed its roles in the Nigeria's electoral process during the First Republic left so much to be desired based on their reportage, comments, editorials and presentation of issues. He notes that the press acted as megaphones and instrument of propaganda for the feuding politicians, and therefore, operated within the narrow prisms of party politics during the period. Lending credence to this claim, Ikieba (2017) maintains that party-based ownership of newspapers reflected in their reportage of political activities during the First Republic, adding that "these newspapers represented good examples of over-zealous and irresponsible partisanship and recklessness (Omu, 1978 cited in Ikiebe, 2017). The newspapers were majorly serving the political interests of their proprietors, especially during election periods and major political crises.

Also, government-owned newspapers were established during the period as political weapons of either the federal or regional governments (Mordi, 2018). In 1961, the federal government of Nigeria established the Morning Post as its daily newspaper and Sunday

Post as its weekly newspaper. Similarly, the Eastern region established the Eastern Nigeria Outlook; Western region established Daily Sketch; while the Northern region took over the management of the Nigerian citizen and rebranded it as the New Nigeria (Ikiebe, 2017). These politically motivated newspapers were largely used to propagate the political parties in power and suppress voices of opposition political parties within the regions. In his own view, Adigun (1998) laments that politicians turned virtually all institutions, including the media, into their instrument for continuation of political warfare. He accused Nigerian politicians of the time of using the media negatively to influence the opinions and perspectives of citizens on political issues.

Table Showing Types of Newspapers During the First Republic

Newspaper Title	Newspaper Type	Owner/Publisher	Area of Influence	Editorial Policy
Nigerian Citizen/ New Nigeria	Government-Owned	Gaskiya Corporation/Northern Region Government	Northern Region	Partisan: Pro-NPC/ Northern Regional Government
Nigerian Morning Post	Government-Owned	Federal Government of Nigeria	Lagos/Nationwide	Partisan: Pro-NPC/ Federal Government of Nigeria
Nigerian Outlook	Government-Owned	Eastern Region Government	Lagos/Eastern Region	Partisan: Pro-NCNC/ Eastern Regional Government
Daily Sketch	Government-Owned	Western Region Government	Lagos/Western Region	Partisan: Pro-NNDP/ Western Regional Government
Daily Express	Overseas Commercial/Political Party	Thomson International/National Investments and Properties Corporation of the Action Group	Lagos/Nationwide	Partisan: Pro-AG and Western Regional Government to 1962; Pro-NNDP/Western Government 1963-1965
Daily Times	Overseas Commercial	London Daily Mirror	Lagos/Nationwide	Pro-Profit
West African Pilot	Political Party	Zik Group of Newspapers	Lagos/Nationwide	Pro-NCNC
Nigerian Tribune	Political Party	Allied Newspapers for AG	Lagos/Nationwide	Pro-AG
COR Advocate			Uyo	
The Northern Star			Kano	
The Eastern Observer			Onitsha?Eastern Region	
The Middle Belt Herald			Jos	
The Borno People			Jos	

Newspaper Title	Newspaper Type	Owner/Publisher	Area of Influence	Editorial Policy
Daily Mail	Political Party	NPC	Kano/Northern Regoion	Pro-NPC/ Northern Region Government

Source: Grant (1971) cited in Mordi (2018)

Conclusion

The evolution of the media in Nigeria's electoral process has its roots in the country's colonial past, dating back to the 1922 Clifford constitution which introduced the elective principle. This marked the beginning of a symbiotic relationship between the media and politics in Nigeria, with nationalists and politicians leveraging the power of newspapers to propagate their interests and ideologies. As this study has shown, the media has played a significant role in shaping Nigeria's electoral landscape, from the early days of independence to the First Republic. The nationalists' establishment of political parties and newspapers to mobilize support and propagate their ideologies set a precedent for future politicians. During the First Republic, newspapers and other media continued to serve as mouthpieces for political parties and politicians, often toeing the line of partisan interests rather than objective reporting. This trend has continued to shape the media landscape in Nigeria, with implications for the country's electoral process and democratic development.

The close relationship between the media and election in Nigeria has had both positive and negative consequences. On the one hand, the media has played a crucial role in mobilizing citizens, raising awareness about key issues, and providing a platform for politicians to articulate their vision. On the other hand, the media's partisan nature has often compromised its objectivity, leading to biased reporting and propaganda. The media involvement in politics remains a critical component of Nigeria's electoral process. Its role in shaping public opinion, holding leaders accountable, and providing a platform for citizens to express their views cannot be overstated. This study has been able to establish that the media's roles in Nigeria's electoral process is a reflection of the country's democratic culture established by the early nationalists and political elites during the period of our study. The political landscape of the country has a profound influence on shaping the norms and values of successive generations of media owners and practitioners, socializing them to embrace and perpetuate this culture. The interplay between politics and media has created a complex web of relationships that has defined the media's role in Nigeria's

In conclusion, this study has shown that the media's role in Nigeria's electoral process is complex and multifaceted, reflecting both the country's history and its ongoing democratic challenges. The foundation of Nigeria's media involvement in politics was laid

on the bedrock of partisanship, and this has continued to shape their roles in the country's electoral process over the years. Despite the passage of time, the media has largely been unable to deviate from the trajectory of being instruments of political propaganda and voter mobilization established by the founding fathers. This entrenched pattern of behavior has been perpetuated by successive generations of media owners and practitioners, who have been socialized into a culture of partisanship and political allegiance. As a result, the media's role in Nigeria's electoral process has been characterized by a persistent lack of objectivity, with many media outlets serving as mouthpieces for their political patrons rather than as watchdogs of the public interest.

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