

Media and Political Participation in Gombe State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The aim of the study is to historicize the role of the media in promoting political participation in Gombe State since 1996, drawing insights from data obtained from interviews and documents. To this end, the study examined how the media has shaped democracy in Gombe since 1996. The findings from the interviews suggest that the effectiveness of the media in Nigeria in promoting democracy has been constrained by several factors. For this reason, Nigerian democracy has remained highly unstable since the return to the current form of democratic government. The study revealed that the development of media houses in Gombe has served to enlighten the local populace on political activities in the state. The media has therefore played the role of a watchdog for checks and balances between the government and the governed and for sensitizing the public through various programs. The paper examines the history of the media's role in promoting political participation, facilitating the free flow of information, and exploring and promoting accountability. It also examines the challenges the media has faced in achieving these goals, such as government censorship, lack of resources, and attacks on journalists. The study concludes with a critical assessment of the media's contribution to democracy and political participation in Gombe State since 1996 and its impact on the broader Nigerian democratic system. The methodology of data collection includes structured interviews and the use of secondary source material.

Keywords: Role, Media, Gombe, Democracy, Participation

Introduction

The media and democracy are closely linked, as democracy is to a certain extent dependent on the media to inform, educate and mobilise its citizens. In a democratic society, the media plays an essential role by facilitating the exchange of ideas and information, providing a platform for diverse voices, monitoring the actions of the government and holding it accountable (Adedokun, 2016). Media organisations in Gombe State, Nigeria have played an important role in shaping democracy in the state since 1996.

The aim of the media in any society is often to educate, inform and enlighten the public. Democratic processes are believed to be strengthened wherever these functions are adequately performed. The role of the media in democracy is generally recognised as crucial to the functioning and progress of democratic societies. The media play a crucial role in providing citizens with information, promoting public discourse, holding those in power to account and ensuring transparency in governance. The Nigerian state of Gombe has undergone significant political and social changes in recent years. However, despite the importance of the media in supporting democratic processes, there is insufficient research and

knowledge on the historical development and influence of the media on political development in Gombe State.

Conceptual Clarification

Media

In mass communication, media are the communication channels or tools used to store and transmit information or data. The term refers to components of the mass communication industry, such as print media, publishing, news media, photography, cinema, broadcasting, digital media and advertising. The term media refers to the communication channels through which we distribute news, music, films, education, advertising messages and other data. These include physical and online newspapers and magazines, television, radio, billboards, telephones, the Internet, faxes and billboards. The media are an important source of mass communication. The media play the most informative role in our society. The internet revolution in the 21st century has led to the rise of social media such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, where the public can access information at the click of a mouse or through their handheld devices.

Democracy

Democracy is a form of government in which the people elect their leaders, who exercise their authority by law through legislation, the execution of tasks and the judiciary. There are various forms of democratic, representative governments: parliamentary, republican, federal and others. The characteristics of democracy include freedom of assembly, freedom of association, property rights, freedom of religion and speech, citizenship, voting rights, freedom from unjustified governmental deprivation of the right to life and liberty, and minority rights. A democracy is a form of government that gives the people the opportunity to exercise political control and limit the power of those in power.

Background of Media and Democracy in Gombe

Democracy is a form of government that gives citizens the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes. The media plays an essential role in promoting democracy by providing information, analyses and debates on public affairs through various media (Encyclopaedia 2023). Gombe State, like several other states in Nigeria, has experienced various political and social changes on its journey to democracy. The mass media plays a crucial role in democracy as it serves as an essential source of information for educating the public and disseminating information (Embu & Galadima, 2001). They provide political information that helps voters make informed decisions. The media also act as a check on those in power. Current discussions about the media often centre on democracy, and different perspectives on the history of communication often reflect different opinions about democracy and its potential (Piechota, 2011).

According to Ojo (1999), the executive, the judiciary and the legislature constitute the other three major estates that comprise the mass media, while the representatives of the media in each country are regarded as the fourth estate of the realm (Ojo, 1999). The mass media are divided into two categories: Print media which includes publications such as newspapers, magazines, leaflets, direct mail, circulars and posters to communicate with the public. The second group is electronic media, which includes radio, television, cinema films, and video recordings (all of which appeal to both the auditory and visual senses) (Kehinde et al. 2015). The two categories of media are analysed below.

First Media Station in Gombe State

Before the creation of Gombe State in 1996, there were two media houses: the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and the Bauchi Radio Corporation (BRC). When Gombe State was created, the NTA set up its office in Gombe. Before the establishment of the office, it was a sub-station usually linked to Bauchi to broadcast some of its programs in NTA Bauchi. But when the state was established, NTA Gombe came into being. After the creation of Gombe state, there was a sort of division of assets between Bauchi and Gombe (Malala, 2023). Gombe took over the assets of BRC Bauchi, which led to the establishment of Gombe State Broadcasting Services (GSBS) in 1996. In 2002, GSBS and Gombe State Television were merged under an Act of the Gombe State Parliament, resulting in Gombe Media Corporation (GMC) (Muhammad, 2023).

Democracy in Gombe State

The state of Gombe was created on October 1, 1996 during the military regime of General Sani Abacha as one of the six additional states created by his government. After years of military rule, Nigeria returned to democratic rule with the election of Olusegun Obasanjo as president and his inauguration in May 1999. Since then, Gombe State has experienced several democratic transitions characterized by gubernatorial elections every four years. Gombe State, like other states in Nigeria, has its own elected governors and House of Assembly. The governor heads the executive while the state assembly is responsible for legislation at the state level. The citizens of Gombe State participate in gubernatorial elections to elect their governor and also elect members of the State House of Assembly in regular elections. Gombe State is divided into eleven (11) local government areas (LGAs), each of which has its own local government council (Sule, 2018).

These councils are responsible for local administration and development. Representatives for these councils are elected in local elections. Democratic elections are held at regular intervals in which citizens can exercise their right to vote and elect their leaders. Various political parties participate in these elections, giving voters the opportunity to choose their preferred candidates. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is responsible for supervising and conducting the elections, including in Gombe State (Sule, 2018). Like any democratic system, Gombe State faces several challenges. These challenges include electoral irregularities, corruption, security concerns such as thuggery and political tensions characterised by the Kalare phenomenon (Abubakar et al. 2018). Ensuring free and fair elections and strengthening democratic institutions are ongoing tasks for state and federal governments.

Establishment of Private Media Houses

The ownership structure of the media plays a crucial role in shaping editorial policy and content production. In Nigeria, print media is predominantly privately owned, while state broadcasters dominate television. However, there is an increasing number of online publications run by individuals, leading to a diversity of perspectives. The development of private media houses dates back to the emergence of private television stations triggered by the deregulation of the electronic media by General Ibrahim Babangida. Privatisation took place in 1992 through the implementation of Decree 38 (Ukonu, 2005), which liberalised the industry and established the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) (Ariye, 2010). This led to the establishment of various private broadcasters across the country, with African Independent Television (AIT) leading the way in 1993. Private media houses emerged in Gombe and took advantage of the deregulated sector. These include Ray Power, Progress Radio, Amana Radio and Vision FM.

To counter negative politics and biased sentiments in political broadcasting, the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) has enforced a mandatory policy for all broadcasters listed in Schedule 4.4.1 of the NBC Code. Sections 4.4.3 and 4.4.5 stipulate that all political programmes must use decent language and that all political parties should be given equal opportunities and airtime to ensure fairness and balance (Yisa, 2003). The operation and performance of the media during this period can be understood from the context and environment in which the media practitioners operated. The Gombe state media and the private media houses provided several educational programmes to the public on politics, governance, social education and community development.

Role of the Media in Democracy

In a democracy, the media are of great importance as they act as the fourth estate and hold those who administer the institutions of society to account. "Democracy is recognised worldwide as an outstanding form of government that promotes human welfare, respect and dignity" (Pate & Sharafa, 2013). The media informs citizens, promotes political conversation and serves as a watchdog to ensure accountability and openness in the face of the volatile political environment and difficulties under which organisations operate. Gombe State is an interesting case study to examine how the media influences voter behaviour during elections and how it affects post-election violence. The media ensures that elected representatives uphold their oath of office and carry out the wishes of those who elected them (Centre for Democracy and Governance, 1999).

In addition, the media plays a crucial role in improving the quality of life (Pate & Sharafa, 2013), shaping public opinion, raising awareness of social issues and promoting positive change within society. In Gombe State, Nigeria, media organisations have proven to be powerful agents of advocacy and sensitisation. What attracted private media houses to Gombe was the geographical location of the state in the centre of the North East (Abubakar, 2023). Popular media houses such as Amana Radio, the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), Gombe Media Corporation (GMC), Progress Radio and Vision FM were able to use their reach and influence to draw attention to important causes, mobilise communities and create awareness on pressing issues. In addition, the media have sometimes struggled to fulfil their democratic roles. There are cases of state interference or censorship that restrict press freedom, and the importance of independent journalism to democracy provides insightful information on the relationship between the media and democracy in Gombe State. Advocacy and sensitisation

A number of studies have shown that the media remains the most credible source of news and information for most people. The importance of the media goes beyond the mere provision of information per se; more often than not, we also use this information to form opinions on very serious issues of material life (Pate & Kurfi, 2022). Media advocacy is the strategic use of media tools to promote social change by influencing public opinion, policy and practise. It utilises mass communication platforms such as newspapers, television stations, radio channels or online platforms to disseminate information that supports a particular cause or issue. The importance of the media lobby lies in its ability to amplify voices that might otherwise go unheard. Media sensitisation, on the other hand, is the process of educating or sensitising individuals to certain social issues or concerns through targeted messages disseminated via various media.

During and even after democratic elections, politicians in Gombe are encouraged to articulate their campaign objectives in the media in order to influence and mould the opinion of the electorate. There are numerous political programmes that are aired on radio and were

particularly popular during the 2019 general elections. Progress Radio, for example, has *Kowa Ya Debo da Zafi* (Anyone who took it hot), where politicians are invited to present their ideas to voters and run their campaigns on the programme. In addition, a programme specifically for the 2019 elections was introduced, known as *Fitilar Siyasa* (the light of politics). In this programme, candidates were invited as guests to present their ideas, and promise voters what they will do after their election (Abubakar, 2023).

There are other programmes on Progress Radio that provide information on social health, environment, politics and other relevant issues. These programmes include expert interviews, discussions and informative features such as Viewpoints on Progress Radio, *Tumbin Giwa* (Elephant Boot), *Birgimar Hankaka* (crow crumble) current affairs programme that educates the public on current issues in the state and across the country. Progress Radio's other educational programmes include *Mata Ina Muka Dosa* (Women, Where Are We Going?), a programme that discusses women-related issues such as marital problems, and *Lafiyar Ka Jarin Ka* (Health is wealth), a health programme that invites medical practitioners to discuss health issues (Abubakar, 2023).

Similarly, Vision FM broadcasts educational programmes such as *Mutum Da Duniyar Sa* (Man and his world), a programme that answers questions about the legacy of fallen heroes in society. It also broadcasts *Mata Iyayen Mu* (Women, Our Parents), a programme that discusses women-related issues such as gender equality, etc. (Tofa, 2023). In addition, other social media campaigns are also conducted to amplify specific calls to action on certain issues. Using these methods, media organisations are able to raise mass awareness of pressing issues such as gender inequality, poverty alleviation or environmental protection. Media organisations enable citizens not only to understand these issues, but also to actively engage with them. Different types of media organisations, including print, broadcast and online platforms, play a critical role in advocating for social change and raising public awareness in Gombe State. The coverage goes beyond Gombe State. Print media provide in-depth coverage of important issues through investigative journalism and opinion pieces that stimulate conversation among readers. Broadcasting platforms such as television stations or radio channels have a wider reach that enables them to reach a larger audience with news reports or talk shows.

Most radio stations across the state broadcast programmes such as *Idon Gari* (Eye of the Community), a programme on Vision FM Gombe. This programme interviews the people of Gombe on what is happening around them, such as issues of water supply, electricity, roads and other infrastructural developments, going to different corners of the state. Another notable programme is titled *Meke Faruwa a Anguwannin Ku* (What's happening in your community), a media programme aired on Progress Radio Gombe (Malala, 2023). In Gombe State, there have been notable cases where media campaigns have successfully promoted various causes. For instance, Vision FM's Adamu Ali Tongo's "*Meke Faruwa a Anguwannin Ku*" (what is happening in your community) campaign to draw government's attention to what is happening in the remote areas of the state has helped to draw government's attention to improving the living standards of the people. In one of his reports, Adamu Ali Tongo visited a village in Yamaltu/Deba Local Government Area where a single hospital was found without essential health facilities. The report was subsequently aired and prompted the state government to provide assistance to the affected community. All these successes were made possible by the media (Malala, 2023). Despite this progress, much still needs to be done to reach more areas because "There is a strong disparity between urban and rural populations in terms of access to information." Hence the need for aggressive rural-centred information dissemination (Aligwe et' al., 2015). The Managing Director of Vision FM says, "We aim to

provide comprehensive coverage of the North East of Nigeria, an area ravaged by the Boko Haram insurgency” (Musa, 2023). He believes that the media can contribute by providing a platform to facilitate the solution.

Different types of media organisations, including print, broadcast and online platforms, play a crucial role in promoting social change and raising public awareness in Gombe State. Print media report extensively on important issues through investigative journalism and opinion pieces that make readers think. Broadcasting platforms such as television stations or radio channels have a wider reach and can reach a larger audience through news reports or talk shows. However, these media organisations face challenges in their advocacy and awareness-raising efforts. Limited resources may prevent them from conducting extensive research or maintaining a consistent presence on multiple platforms. In addition, censorship can limit the extent to which they can openly discuss sensitive topics. Despite these challenges, media organisations in Gombe State have consistently found ways to overcome the obstacles.

They are working with civil society groups, utilising digital technologies to achieve greater reach and adapting their strategies based on audience feedback. The impact of media outreach and awareness-raising activities in Gombe State has been significant. These initiatives have raised awareness of critical issues among citizens who might otherwise be uninformed or indifferent. Through their campaigns, media organisations have influenced public opinion, leading to changes in policies or practises that address societal concerns.

Looking to the future, there is immense potential for further use of the media as a tool for advocacy and sensitisation in Gombe State. By harnessing new technologies and including diverse voices from marginalised communities in discussions on social issues, media organisations can continue to amplify important causes while seeking wider participation (Malala, 2023).

Media and Election

The media has a significant influence on voter behaviour in elections by shaping public opinion through news reporting and political campaign advertising (Rak & Płotka, 2022). In Gombe State, collaboration between the media, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and other civil society organisations (CSOs) has led to the sensitisation of the electorate (Abubakar, 2023). The media provides platforms for candidates to present their policies and verify their promises against previous results. During the general elections in Gombe State, Amana FM, Progress FM and Vision FM usually send correspondents to the eleven local government areas (LGAs) of the state to report live (Malala, 2023). The TV stations organise debates so that voters can make informed choices based on political discussions. By disseminating information, the media educate voters about the candidates, their policies and election-related events. This helps citizens to make an informed decision at elections. The media educates voters about the electoral process, including voter registration, voting procedures and the importance of citizen participation. Media platforms also facilitate debates and discussions between candidates and interest groups, allowing voters to compare and contrast different perspectives. The media monitors polling stations, reports irregularities and highlights attempts at voter suppression, thus contributing to transparent and fair elections (Malala, 2023).

The Role of Media in Post-Election Violence

The role of the media in reporting post-election violence is crucial; however, reporting can either prevent or exacerbate conflict. Responsible journalism seeks to maintain peace by promptly providing accurate information about election results. However, irresponsible reporting can further exacerbate tensions. Media can recognise and report on tensions or

potential triggers for post-election violence by providing early warning signals. To improve peacebuilding through responsible reporting and high-profile messages, the media can promote peaceful coexistence and counteract post-election violence. This is achieved through investigative journalism. Media investigations can uncover the causes of post-election violence and hold those responsible to account.

The media can play a crucial role in preventing post-election violence, especially in the age of social media where media houses are active on various social media platforms. Therefore, broadcasters must endeavour to check the facts thoroughly before publishing them. This precaution is essential as publishing results that are not cumulative could potentially cause tension between supporters of different political parties. The media should ensure that all results are accurate before disseminating them. In view of the recently concluded 2023 general elections, there have been sporadic incidents of violence in some states. However, there were no such incidents in Gombe. Instead, fake news about the election results circulated on social media. When the real results were finally announced, there was a wave of violence and protests by supporters of various political parties. These supporters accused the electoral authorities of having received false information via social media that did not correspond to the actual election results. Therefore, it is evident that the media plays a pivotal role in preventing pre- and post-election violence by carefully scrutinising information for accuracy (Abubakar, 2023). While democracy inherently involves opposing viewpoints, the presence of fake news exacerbates this situation. Fake news increases mistrust, division and even violence in an already fragmented and diverse society. Moreover, they have the ability to weaken public trust in media sources and undermine the confidence and security of citizens. Furthermore, fake news can promote undemocratic tendencies and ultimately undermine trust in the democratic system itself (Pate et al., 2019).

Media and Governance

The media holds government officials accountable by reporting on their actions, decisions and use of public funds. If the media plays its role as expected, there must be good governance. In 1999, for example, it was the media that persuaded the military to hand over power to a democratically elected government. This was due to the contributions of practising journalists and some editors who reported numerous stories on the importance of democracy and gained the support of the international community. As a result, democracy was restored in Nigeria and it continues to this day (Malala, 2023). Good governance also involves the provision of social amenities such as schools and hospitals as well as ensuring the security of lives and property. Therefore, the media provides an opportunity for the public to scrutinise the leadership and thus help to correct any shortcomings or mistakes made by those in power.

The media interacts with the public to gather their opinions through polls, conduct public interviews, and share their concerns. This is done with the intention of presenting these issues on broadcast media, which indirectly captures the attention of those in power. The media serves as a conduit, conveying the public's messages to the government while also transmitting the government's messages to the people. These interactions occur through the dissemination of news and programmes that are broadcast throughout the state (Muhammad, 2023).

Media as a Watchdog for Checks and Balances

The media acts as a platform by monitoring the government's actions, policies and decisions to prevent abuse of power (Theophilus et al., 2020). The media analyses and criticises government policies and ensures that they are in line with the public interest. In Gombe State, the media's responsibility to investigate allegations of misuse of public funds or human rights violations is something to be reckoned with. By reporting on these issues, the media ensures

accountability and fosters trust between citizens and their elected representatives. Programmes such as "Idon Gari" (Eye of the Town), a programme on Vision FM Gombe, *Meke Faruwa a Anguwannin Ku* (what is happening in your community) and *Fitilar Siyasa* (the light of politics) on Progress Radio. These media programmes have served and still serve as watchdogs to check and balance government activities. The media also demand transparency in government operations and finances, such as budget implementation in the communities. The media ensured that citizens had access to accurate and timely information. The media encourages citizens to actively participate in governance by providing them with a platform to raise their concerns and demand for better services (Tofa, 2023).

Challenges facing the media houses in Gombe

In addition, GMC, the state media house, is struggling with revenue problems because it does not place advertisements for the opposition in the state-controlled media. This has affected its revenue over time (Muhammad, 2023). As long as GMC is not given a free hand to operate in a democratized media environment, it will continue to face such problems (Malala, 2023).

Similarly, electricity supply is a challenge for media houses in Gombe. Instability in the power sector has caused several companies in the country to shut down their operations and even relocate to other neighbouring countries. The media sector is no exception. Power outages have forced media houses to rely on gensets, which are expensive to maintain. GMC, which has good power generators provided by the government, sometimes finds it difficult to operate them.

Threats from the political opposition affected the operations of some media houses. On the eve of the 2019 general elections in Gombe State, Progress Radio hosted a program for the opposition All Progressives Congress (APC). It was not long before political thugs and supporters of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) and the incumbent government stormed the station and destroyed its facilities. Despite these attacks, the media stood firm and continued its work of propagating democratic norms and values to the public (Abubakar, 2023).

Furthermore, the evolving nature of social media such as Twitter and Facebook has not only revitalized democratic ideals "by serving as alternative news sources for Nigerians, but also setting the news agenda of the domestic mass media." Social media platforms spread news very fast, which is sometimes detrimental to the public. The media must stand out from the crowd in this era of social media by adhering to time-honoured journalistic principles before publishing news in order to remain an authentic source of information (Kperogi, 2016).

Another aspect worth mentioning is the print media, which did not develop in Gombe due to their capital-intensive nature. They require a printing press, the establishment of a distribution department and an editorial team, unlike the broadcast media which requires less capital. With modern equipment, a broadcast media can be set up in one room with one transmitter and very little staff. This is the reason why there are no government or private newspapers and magazines in Gombe State.

Another development is the digital conversion of all media houses from analogue to digital equipment. Despite this development, GMC has been operating with obsolete analogue equipment for more than twenty years. In fact, a day was set aside in the country for this purpose but to no avail as far as GMC is concerned (Muhammad, 2023). The Gombe State Government must address this problem to keep GMC alive in this difficult environment.

Most journalists lack adequate training, which can affect the quality and accuracy of their reporting. In addition, the media faces an ethical dilemma, especially in a polarised environment where bias or sensationalism can undermine credible journalism. It is a well-known fact that unethical behaviour tarnishes a person's reputation. In other circumstances, a person who violates ethical principles is very unlikely to attain a position of responsibility and leadership (Pate, 2018). To summarise, limited financial resources, inadequate infrastructure, censorship attempts, harassment of journalists and political interference are some of the obstacles faced by media houses working within the state. These challenges affect press freedom and undermine democracy.

Conclusion

From 1996 to date, the role of the media in Gombe State and its influence on democracy has changed considerably. The media has become an important tool for citizens to express their opinions, access information and ensure government accountability. Different media have taken on different roles, ranging from investigative journalism to civic education, helping to strengthen democratic processes. However, there are areas where the role of the media can be further strengthened. Unbiased and fair reporting could help to reduce political tensions and promote social cohesion. By taking a leading role in educating citizens about democratic processes and their rights, media organizations can empower people to actively participate in the democratic process. Acquiring digital skills is crucial in the modern age as it enables the media to make effective use of the challenges and opportunities created by digital technologies. The impact of the media on voter behaviour, government accountability and balanced journalism is evident, and initiatives such as radio programs have created platforms for awareness and scrutiny of government actions. In a broader context, the role of the media in democracy cannot be overstated. A strong and free media empowers citizens, promotes political discourse and protects against abuse of power. The study contributes to the knowledge that the role of the media in democracy should be promoted and protected to ensure transparency, accountability and inclusive governance. The lessons we learn from Gombe State's experience with media and democracy can help us in our efforts to strengthen democratic processes and promote open and accountable governance.

List of Informants

SN	NAME	AGE	ADDRESS	OCCUPATION	Date
1	Bilya Yaro Dawakin Tofa	35	Program Division Vision FM	Programmer	26 th July, 2023
2	Umar Faruq Musa	55+	Jabi, Abuja	CEO, Vision Multimedia Services	
3	Saidu Bappah Malala		I. O Ministry of Education Gombe State	Chairman, Nigerian Union of Journalists Gombe State	14 th July, 2023
4	Muhammad Ibrahim Gombe	50-	Gombe Media Corporation (GMC)	Director News and Current Affairs Department	25 th July, 2023

				GMC	
5	Umar Ahmad Abubakar	37	Progress Radio Gombe	Head of News, Progress Radio Gombe	14 th July, 2023
6.	Bappah Hammari	55+	Dawaki Quarters Gombe	Retiree	24 th July, 2023

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