

SIERRA LEONE

State of the Media Report 2017

**PRELUDE TO THE 2018 GENERAL
ELECTIONS**



Professor Ritchard T. M'Bayo, PhD.
Series Editor

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A PUBLICATION OF THE MEDIA REFORM COORDINATING GROUP OF
SIERRA LEONE (MRCG-SL)

Led by

The Department of Mass Communication, Fourah Bay College,
University of Sierra Leone

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Foreword

For media agencies in Sierra Leone, 2017 was indeed a bumper year. There was no shortage of newsworthy events. Pseudo events also were galore, with fake news blazing the media horizon like the evening sun.

Among the journalistic cadre, we noticed that there were quite a number of muted voices, muffled drums, spin doctors, radicals, collaborators, and pretenders, all claiming to serve the journalism profession and, above all, the country in the best democratic tradition.

It makes one wonder if there is really an animal called “the neutral” or “objective” journalist. Nonetheless, we have managed to survive another year of political turbulence, and our report card is amazingly flattering – as professionals, we are somewhat better off now than we have been since political independence in 1961, although we are yet to reach the bench mark of professionalism that the Media Reform Coordinating Group of Sierra Leone (MRCGSL) has set for media practitioners in the country.

Quite a number of journalists now have some academic and professional training, many have become technology savvy and have access to the Internet, with slightly improved research skills, although some see the need to fact check their stories before they go to press or broadcast, as an unnecessary inconvenience.

Over all, 2017 was like a circus with all of us like skaters on the ice pitch, tumbling over each other every now and again but managing to get back on our feet to finish the race, and we did. Bravo! As at the time this report was published, we have a new man, but not actually so new because we’ve seen him before, as Head of State. The report covers some post elections activities and programmes in early 2018.

Congratulations to his Excellency.

Thank you once again, MRCG-SL for support, and thank you FBC-Mass Comm, the training platform of professional media practitioners in Sierra Leone.

Francis Sowa
Chairman of the Board –MRCG-SL
State of the Media 2017

Investigative Journalism and Democratic Accountability in Sierra Leone

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A popular government, without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a prologue to a Farce or Tragedy; or, perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance: And a people who mean to be their own governors, must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives.
(James Madison, 1822)

ABSTRACT

In liberal democratic theory, the media are anchored within the concept of the Fourth Estate which recognizes them as the undisputed guardians of the public interest. In other words, the media are a legitimate democratic institution created with powers to operate without serious legislative control while enjoying a host of privileges from society. The *quid pro quo* is that under such circumstances the media would be able to hold the government and the institutions through which it exercises its power and powerful individuals in society to account. Such a function lies within the bosom of that genre of media work known as Investigative Journalism. Sierra Leone is not a classic liberal democratic state but a transitional democracy with strong aspirations towards a liberal democratic ideal.

This explains why its media operates with a Fourth Estate outlook as expected by the people. This article argues that in the lead up to the 2018 general and presidential elections in Sierra Leone, there were key moments at which the absence of investigative journalism meant that the issues, that may well have decided the elections, were episodically treated with serious consequences for policy action in the new dispensation. It is further argued that unless urgent, deliberate and adequate steps are taken to make investigative journalism an integral part of the country's fledgling Fourth Estate practice, democratic institutions would continue to be weak, corrupt and susceptible to political manipulation by successive governments and powerful business interests.

Key words: liberal democratic theory; public interest; investigative journalism; fourth estate; democratic institutions.

INTRODUCTION

In this 21st century, the issues confronting nations and the world as a community are very complex. They are so composite to the extent that they are difficult to understand even at the most basic of levels, without bringing into focus the idea of contextualizing them and eventually exercising control over them. The issues range from major global questions like terrorism and cyber crimes to local ones like determining rational electoral choices and making sense of issues like national budgetary allocations and reaching international cooperation agreements.

McNair (2009) believes that in a situation like this journalism becomes the citizen's contact with the environment beyond their direct and personal experience. Journalism therefore serves to feed and sustain the democratic process by supplying citizens with the information they require to make rational electoral and economic choices.

ROUTINE JOURNALISM IN QUESTION

It is called routine or everyday journalism because of the way it is done and the intentions of the practitioners. Routine journalism covers news conferences, road accidents, dramatic announcements and such other set-piece events with the sole purpose of raising awareness and so satisfy the appetite for daily news or, increasingly these days, real time news. Investigative journalism is a bit more profound.

According to Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) investigative journalism involves reporters themselves uncovering and documenting activities that have been previously unknown to the public. It is such reporting that would result in a public inquiry.

Communication scholar Shanto Iyengar conducted a groundbreaking study into how the US media framed political reporting mostly on television and concluded that there were significant biases in the way the news is framed. He argued that most news were episodic rather than thematic. In episodic reporting, the focus is on the people caught up in the news event and those framed as being responsible for creating the immediate drama. Such coverage is personalized, dramatic and almost always fragmented from its larger context.

Thematic reporting on the other hand is geared towards bringing about action to change the situation under focus. It goes beyond the human drama of the moment exploring the origins of problems and the larger social, economic or political contexts in which the immediate news has developed (Iyengar, 1999). Investigative journalism falls within the realm of thematic reporting.

In a country like Sierra Leone with the literacy rate as low as 41 per cent, according to the UN Development Programme, the complexities of modern governance cannot be explained by short bursts of reporting from set-piece events. While it may satisfy the daily news desire it leaves huge gaps in the cognitive maps of the audience such that they are unable to act to alter their social circumstances based on episodic reporting. The case then for investigative journalism could not be better made.

De Burgh (2008) argued in his seminal work on the subject that:

Investigative Journalism has helped bring down governments, imprison politicians, trigger legislation, reveal miscarriages of justice and shame corporations. Even today, when much of the media colludes with power and when viciousness and sensationalism are staples of formerly high-minded media, investigative journalists can stand up for the powerless, the exploited.

DEMOCRATIC ACCOUNTABILITY

This work examines the critical nexus between the aspirations of investigative journalism and democratic accountability insofar as it relates to service delivery on behalf of citizens in a democracy. Political accountability refers more directly to the many ways in which citizens, political parties, parliaments and other democratic actors can provide feedback to, reward or sanction officials in charge of formulating and enacting public policy. Well functioning accountability mechanisms are believed to provide incentives for governments to work in the best interests of citizens.

Democratic structures, which allow citizens and their representatives to hold their governments to account by either rewarding or punishing them, are often considered as the cornerstones of representative democracy. Such accountability measures constrain political power and can therefore prevent its exercise from turning into abuse (Jemlin, 2011).

The ideal may have been described above because in reality many democracies are in the claws of weak accountability mechanisms such as faulty elections, compromised parliaments and non-credible political parties that have a warped view of their democratic roles. So, while everyday journalism is enough to create awareness of the work of all democratic institutions it takes investigative journalism of the highest quality to make them accountable and to help the ordinary citizen decide what political choices to make periodically.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper is situated within the theoretical framework of Watchdog Journalism. This theory clearly underlines the media's unrelenting commitment to the Public Service ethos, which accounts for the special position reserved for them in democracies. To discuss the Watchdog role of the media, Lister (2014) goes back to the mid 70s with reference to the *New World Information and Communication Order* (NWICO). He notes the fact that no matter the original intentions to redress, the balance of the North/South news divide, many African governments effectively used the media in their countries under the guise of making them partners in the development of the states that emerged from colonial rule.

Such takeover crystallized into ministries of information and powerful state broadcasters and newspapers, which are still alive in 21st century Africa. Therefore, the new journalistic genre called Investigative Journalism, otherwise called exposure journalism, was intended to be a new state of mind for the whole media industry with the overall objective of giving power to the people. In an ideal journalistic world it encompasses the highest standards of accuracy and fairness, ethics and professionalism. This is best practised in media institutions that strongly adhere to the principles of editorial independence, rather than in government, corporate or politically owned entities where shackles are often placed on journalists and where other agendas come into play (Ibid).

The Watchdog theory presents investigative journalism as a good in itself because exposure of problems leads to identification of solutions. Through ‘good journalism’, development will be promoted as people are able to make sound decisions as active participants in their own development with democracy contributing towards knowledge-based societies.

Watchdog journalism does not only target governments, but exposes wrongdoing in other sectors including business and NGOs, and ideally, the media institutions themselves. The practitioners of this genre are people with passion, integrity and commitment to serve humanity.

The modern day conception of the Watchdog theory mirrors the journalist investigating, rather than merely reporting information given out at press conferences. The job of the investigative journalist is to expose wrongdoing and deceit in public office and to act as a key mechanism of public accountability in a democracy.

CHALLENGES FACING INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM

There is no doubt that the virtues of investigative journalism in a democracy are immense but in this age of rapid and fundamental changes in news consumption habits and patterns occasioned largely by phenomenal advances in technological development, the genre is facing existential challenges including the globalization of the media which resulted in a small number of very powerful corporations steep in commercial instinct running the world media. Now there are dramatic and telling

cutbacks in staff and resources in the traditional media.

There is almost an unstoppable desire among corporate executives to pressurize editorial departments in subtle and sometimes overt ways to concentrate on entertainment values as opposed to, say, news and current affairs - the sort of subject matter that has more to do with the public interest. In Africa, this trend appears to have picked up steam even with Public Service broadcasters whose traditional functions have always been tied around the overriding need to promote the public interest.

Another key challenge is that the legal regime in many countries across Africa remain largely anti—media. Anachronistic colonial relics like seditious and criminal libel laws remain in place and with the ever rising cost of legal actions against the media; a major deterrent against probing confrontational journalism in the cash strapped media is personified.

There are hopeful noises in Sierra Leone at the start of the new political administration of Julius Maada Bio that the media landscape would be released from the claws of obnoxious legislations and unbridled political interference. He told parliament in Freetown that:

My administration will take immediate steps to repeal the seditious libel law, support the School of Journalism and other institutions to train journalists, encourage the private sector to invest in the media, provide budgetary subvention to SLAJ, enhance the capacity of the IMC to enforce the IMC Act and review the legal and operational status of the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation to make it a truly professional national broadcaster (Bio, 2018).

Investigative journalism does not just happen; it is not just a matter of journalists following their ‘natural instincts’. Investigative journalism has to be organized, resourced and protected. It depends on trained journalists, supportive editors and a substantial budget. These are in short supply in most media organizations around the world.

The institutions of the state in Africa are rarely able or willing to assist investigative journalists carry out their tasks. They are gripped by a culture silence underpinned by the desire to ingratiate themselves with a patrimonial leadership or out of fear of reprisals. And without the active cooperation of

state institutions, the successful investigative journalism done on the Watergate question would be impossible. Schudson (2003) makes the point that:

There would have been no presidential resignation had it not been for Judge John Sirica, the Ervin Committee, the existence and discovery of the White House tapes, and other factors...The general accounting office, Common Cause, and the Democratic National Committee and its lawsuit against the Nixon campaign all forced disclosures that kept the Watergate story in the public eye. Moreover, the journalistic contribution itself was dependent on government officials who risked their jobs or their careers by leaking to the press (Ibid).

THE 18 MILLION US DOLLAR ALLEGATION

Presidential debates during election campaigns are beginning to appear on the African continent where, because voting patterns are mostly based on primordial interests, patrimonial considerations and outright corruption such debates have done very little to swing votes one way or the other. Nonetheless they are watched with keen interest by mostly middle class and first time voters. In the last of such debates ahead of the 2018 presidential elections, the former ruling party candidate Dr Samura Kamara accused the candidate of the then main opposition party at the time, Julius Maada Bio (now president) of converting EIGHTEEN MILLION US dollars meant for the state to his personal use more than twenty years ago when he was a military Head of State. At that time Kamara was the country's Financial Secretary.

Despite Kamara not putting forward any evidence to back his claim, the eighteen million dollar issue became a constant line of attack for his campaign staff for the week or so leading to polling day. The media merely reported the story as narrated on the debate floor. No further light was shed on the issue either by the APC candidate or the media. May be it was part of their political calculations not to further clarify the issue.

THE DEADLY MUDSLIDE

When a massive mudslide occurred in the Mortomeh community in the hills overlooking Freetown, thousands perished. The media – both

local and international descended on the story like a swarm of locusts in a corn field but their coverage remained largely episodic, focusing on the loss of lives and property. In the heat of the moment such coverage is expected. But several months on, the fundamental questions about how a dangerous mountain slope clearly within the environmental exclusion belt came to be occupied by mostly big politicians, senior civil servants, business people and indeed some ordinary folks, remain unanswered.

The political consequence was that the ruling party suffered badly at the polls, losing what was a safe seat to the opposition in that area. There was talk all over the place of serious administrative lapses and corruption in the Ministry of Lands and the Environment where documents were prepared handing over the land to the people who died on that fateful morning.

For both incidents routine journalism is totally inadequate because it could not move beyond simply calling attention to the issue of those who died, properties lost and the immediate suffering of the survivors.

Now in the 18 million dollars case, it was easy for the opposition then to dismiss the allegation as a desperate attempt by the then ruling party to save a failing presidential campaign.

In the second case, graphic pictures of dead bodies, wounded people, crying babies are gone. With elections around the corner, the former government was keen to get the issue off the headlines as exemplified by how hurriedly they moved the survivors out of temporary shelters. They clearly did not like those settlements to be visible on voting day.

CONCLUSION

In today's world of economic inequality and misinformation, misleading partial information, and outright lies spread on the internet, the truth — the “whole” truth — has become a scarce and valuable commodity. Take the two scenarios above: for the investigative journalist, such a weighty allegation made on a national platform like the presidential debate and the circumstances that led to the easily avoidable deaths of more than one thousand citizens was enough to get them started. The major problem in most newsrooms is that when personal or dramatic elements isolate or fragment a story from larger social, historical, or political contexts, the news fails to offer a basis for learning and generalizing. When William Russell, a man credited

as the first investigative Journalist covered the Crimean war in 1853 – 56 and exposed weakness of the British forces, the result in Britain was that significant reforms were put in place. Street (2011) notes that:

The consequences of such revelatory reporting were that the government fell; a new post, that of Secretary of State for War, was created; conditions for the troops were improved; the *Times of London* got a fund set up to provide medical; influenced by his journalism Florence Nightingale and others went to the war and built the foundations of a war nursing profession; in time the army commissioning system was reformed thanks to his revelations, a change that would have an important influence on Britain's ability to wage war (de Burgh, 2000).

For investigative journalism to take root and flourish in Sierra Leone, a tripartite approach is required. That brings together the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), the University and other training institutions and foundations interested in funding such projects.

They must make a priority of encouraging young journalists to develop an interest in this genre under close supervision from established journalists in a well structured mentorship program.

The publication of specialist magazines and the production of such radio and television programs should not be considered as long term objectives.

All inhibiting laws must be repealed with immediate effect.

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“For investigative journalism to take root and flourish in Sierra Leone, a tripartite approach is required. That brings together the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), the University and other training institutions and foundations interested in funding such projects.”

Media Impact on Political Campaigns in Sierra Leone: Prelude to the 2018 General Elections

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This is a pilot study designed to develop an inventory of predictive factors of electoral victory in the pre-election campaigns of the 2018 general elections in Sierra Leone. By predictive factors I mean those factors that may have influenced voter decision ahead of the actual elections in March 2018. The study is retrospective, focusing on what happened and how it happened as Sierra Leoneans prepared to choose a new leadership or to support the incumbent for a prolongation of tenure.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to assess the impact of the media on voter behavior during national elections in Sierra Leone. Ultimately, the primary concern of the study will focus on the following questions:

RQ1: To what extent do the media influence the voting decisions of the electorate during national elections.

RQ2: Which of the following variables play a more significant role in influencing voter decision:

- a) The message
- b) The source of the message
- c) The channel through which the messages are disseminated?
- d) Newspapers
- e) Radio
- f) Television
- g) Social Media
- h) Other (Traditional Systems)

RQ3: How significant are the following in influencing voter behavior regarding the decision to vote for one candidate or the other?

- a) Political Campaigns
- b) Political Advertising, and
- c) Social Interactions,

This study attempted to assess how these variables applied to the Sierra Leone situation and whether there were extraneous variables that provided alternative explanations of voter behavior in Sierra Leone relative to the mass media.

Methodology

In developing the inventory of predictive factors, a qualitative content analysis approach was adopted. The process required media monitoring focusing on print, electronic, and new media, particularly social media. Essentially, I monitored media presentations, editorial content, commentaries and social media and web presence of the candidates and their supporters. Reactions to what the candidates did, what they said about themselves, what they said about others and what others said about the candidates provided the crucial elements of the predictive factors. I then summarized the notes and developed concepts that captured the ideas and opinions that were used as predictive factors of victory in the pending elections.

The primary aim of this pilot study was to develop the inventory of predictive factors. My goal, ultimately, is to construct a model that could be used to predict victory in future elections. This, obviously, is a gigantic task. And I've taken the bold step to deviate from more sophisticated models and approaches such as those used in election forecasting in the United States.

It is an innovation that deviates significantly from traditional social science approaches of forecasting election results. But I strongly believe that such a model could be developed and could be a major dimension of the electoral process in a country like Sierra Leone with only a population of about seven million.

Theretical Framework

Politics, electorates, and campaigns are all complex phenomena that defy even the most sophisticated and carefully designed statistical predictions. Because of this, the field of social science is sometimes referred to as schizophrenic – scholars hardly agree unanimously on any one issue. Hence, what we have in the field are competing, and sometimes conflicting, explanations, of *what we call as theories*, of how and why things happen in social life.

Ultimately, the study attempted to assess how voter’s existing beliefs, advertising by competing candidates and filtration of the candidates’ words and deeds through the news media might have influenced voter decision in the 2018 elections.

A seminal article by Kurt Lang and Gladys E. Lang, first published in 1959 in a book edited by Eugene Burdic and Arthur J. Brodbeck, entitled American voting behavior. The article, reprinted in numerous publications, including the *Reader in public opinion and mass communication* (Janowits and Hirsh, 1981), posed the question:

Exactly what do we learn about the influence of mass communication on voting behavior?” the authors asked. “Media exposure gets out the vote at the same time that it solidifies preferences. It crystallizes and reinforces more than it converts.”

Accordingly, the minds of most voters are closed even before the campaign officially opens (Lang and Lang, 1981). “The campaign period, then, would seem inherently to be less a period of potential change than a period of political entrenchment.. This may well be a real paradox of life. We are accustomed to think of campaign periods as the dynamic times when political passions are aroused and wholesale changeover results.”

Preliminary Findings

The goal of this pilot study was to (a) develop an inventory of factors that could be used to predict the outcomes of an election. These factors could be used subsequently as the building blocks of a research instrument such as a self-administered

survey questionnaire to collect quantitative data and, through statistical analysis assess the strength and significance between electoral victory as INDEPENDENT VARIABLE and the predictive factors as the DEPENDENT VARIABLES.

Elements of Predictive Factors

Key attributes of these factors, include:

- a) Public Sphere
- b) Social Media
- c) Candidate Visibility
- d) Charisma
- e) Incumbency
- f) Determinism and Tenacity
- g) Crisis Management Skills
- h) Legitimization
- i) Campaign Strategy
- j) Issues Management
- k) Candidate Credibility
- l) Platform
- m) Credentials
- n) Youth Culture
- o) Women
- p) Religion
- q) Ethnicity
- r) Regionalism
- s) National Character
- t) Socio-Political Issues of the Campaigns

Conclusion

I assume in the study that in some cases, statistically significant relationship exists between the INDEPENDENT VARIABLE and the DEPENDENT VARIABLES. In other cases, the relationship is not significant (statistically) and cannot be used to predict electoral victory.

Quite obviously, the list of predictive factors is not exhaustive. The next stage of the study will be to conduct a more comprehensive survey aimed at collecting data from which we can confidently predict electoral victory.

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Radio as a Democratic Platform to Foster Free, Fair and Peaceful Elections: A Survey on the Role and Performance of Radio Democracy FM 98.1

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Abstract

This article examines public access and participation in “**The Gud Morning Salon**” current affairs programme of Radio Democracy FM98.1 in terms of reporting on pertinent issues that precluded the 2018 Elections in Sierra Leone. Radio is the popular medium of mass communication in Sierra Leone because of the low level of literacy and the possibility for everyone to access and participate in broadcast programmes without much financial burden. The key programme selected for this survey is the “**Gud Morning Salon**” which is aired every morning from Monday to Friday. This programme brings all actors to a common platform to discuss or respond to national issues fearlessly. Indicatively it seems to be setting the agenda on national discourse. Throughout the electoral cycle, The “Gud Morning Salon” served as a platform for politicians, voters, and Elections Management Body for civic dialogue. It is therefore significant to evaluate the impact of this Station in reporting the Electoral Process.

Background

The media in an election play a key role, not only as a means of scrutinizing government actions, but

also ensuring that the electorate has all the necessary information at its disposal to make an informed and democratic choice. It is based on this premise that most scholars and activists claim that

media are essential to democracy, and a democratic election is impossible without media since a free and fair election is not only about the freedom to vote and the knowledge of how to cast a vote, but also about a participatory process where voters engage in public debate and have adequate information about political parties, policies, candidates and the electoral process itself in order to make informed choices¹.

Radio is the most popular mass media for reporting elections in Africa, especially in Sierra Leone where most of the voters are illiterates and most live in rural communities. Being the medium that informs, educates and mobilizes voters, and at the same time scrutinizes candidates, monitors the electoral process,² Radio is generally perceived as a democratic platform during elections:

- by educating voters on how to exercise their democratic rights;
- by reporting on the development of an election campaign;
- by providing a platform for the political parties and candidates to communicate their message to the electorate;
- by providing a platform for the public to communicate their concerns, opinions, and needs, to the parties/candidates, the EMB, the government, and to other voters, and to interact on these issues;

¹ *Election Reporting Handbook*, International Federation of Journalists (n.d.)

<http://www.ifj.org/nc/en/news-single-view/category/meeting-1/article/election-reporting-handbook/>

² Ross Howard, *Media + Elections, An Elections Reporting Handbook*, (IMPACS Associate, 2004)

- by allowing the parties and candidates to debate with each other;
- by reporting results and monitoring vote counting;
- by scrutinizing the electoral process itself, including electoral management, in order to evaluate the fairness of the process, its efficiency, and its probity;
- by providing information that, as far as possible, avoids inflammatory language, helping to prevent election-related violence.

It is against this background pertaining to the role of the Radio in fostering free, fair and credible elections that this article seeks to evaluate the performance of Radio Democracy FM 98.1 I am using a perception survey targeting the listeners who were exposed to some of the major issues reported as happening before the Elections in March 2018.

Radio Democracy was established as an alternative media during the military insurgency in 1997. The Radio was set up to restore democracy in Sierra Leone after the country's democratically elected government was overthrown by a group of military personnel. There was a massive local and international call for the reinstatement of the government³.

Radio Democracy did not only provide regular updates relating to on-going efforts to restore democracy, but has served as a major reporter of the issues that counteracted the propaganda machinery of the military junta. It was essentially a medium through which pressure was brought to bear on the military to relinquish power, while at the same time giving hope to a largely crestfallen population. Since 1997, Radio democracy has never ceased to perform its role as a platform for civil society, democracy, rights activists and a mouthpiece for the masses.

One of the popular programmes of the Station is its current affairs programme titled as "Gud Morning Salon," which is a one and half hour live broadcast of current happenings and discussion on key governance issues with the objective of strengthening democratic governance. It usually airs for 5 days (Monday to Friday). The show hosts regular guests that include government

officials, civil society, social commentators, and ordinary citizens to discuss key governance issues and provides a platform for interaction between citizens and guests through text messages. It is also interspersed with pre-recorded as well as live interviews in some cases⁴.

Problem Statement

The station has determined and enthusiastic staff who want to be on top of situations at all time. That notwithstanding, the "Gud Morning Salon" is faced with some challenges including:

- the lack of professional capacity to conduct serious research about some of the issues that feature in the programme;
- too much concentration on live studio discussions instead of featuring pre-recorded documentaries or location interviews as a way to diversify the content and increase audience participation;
- most of the participants think that the Radio studio is a court room for arbitration, which at times serve as intimidation to others;
- the programme seems to be the only programme that attracts large audience and no other programme is being used to maintain the audience size;
- much room is still required for credible audience participation in the programme for it to be real platform for grassroots empowerment.

Research Questions

1. How independent and informed were the discussions in the 'Gud Morning Salon' programme pertaining to the major events which precluded the 2018 Elections that were reported by Radio Democracy FM 98.1?
2. To what extent was the programme participatory and inclusive of all stakeholders?
3. How did the Programme contribute towards informed decision-making and conflict management?

³ <http://radiodemocracy.sl/about-us/>

⁴ <http://radiodemocracy.sl/event/gud-mornin-salon/>

Methodology

The principal technique used for this study is a perception survey which targeted 100 listeners of Radio Democracy FM 98.1 in Freetown. The respondents to the questionnaire randomly were selected given that the purpose of the survey is an attempt to explore the significant impact of a civil society media platform, which is dubbed as “The Voice of the People”. In addition to the questionnaire few interviews were conducted with some people who provided short testimonies to showcase the impact of this Programme on their democratic culture.

In developing the questionnaire and the schedule of the interviews concerning the major episodes through which the Radio’s agenda setting could be envisaged were selected to rate the audience perceptions. Below is a brief description of the selected themes:

- The Sierra Leone Peoples Party Flag bearer contest and conflict management in the process is one of the prominent issues reported during this period. The station hosted party actors like Julius Bio, John Benjamin, Andrew Keilie, and Alpha Timbo on several occasions to express their concerns and to seek the way forward thereby using the Common Ground Media methodology.
- The debate on the ‘More Time Agenda’ for former President Koroma also brought different artists, civil society organizations, and security agencies, legal experts to debate the need for the extension of the tenure of the President then, by looking at the constitutional implications and where possible to impede the agenda considering its security implications.
- The President was also accused of deliberately delaying to announce the date for the Presidential Elections for 2018 just to extend their stay in office. A situation which warranted much concerns and insinuation from the public. This brought several society representatives, opposition parties and legal experts to the Radio to debate the issue and its implications Sierra Leone’s fragile democracy.

- The APC Flag bearer contest, which was very confusing since most aspirants were afraid of losing their positions and fearing of not being expelled from the party because of Anti-Party activity. This situation also brought some prominent aspirants like Alimamy Koroma, Alpha Kanu, Joseph Kamara, and several other Party Officials like the Secretary General and Publicity secretary to the ‘Gud Morning Salon’ programme for constructive analysis on the issue.
- The report of Violent Attacks on popular politicians like Mohamed Karamba Mansaray and Kandeh Koleh Yumkella-who was very vocal in opposing the government of President Koroma and other political activities preceding the elections were encouraged in the Gud Morning Salon programme to argue their points of views.
- The return of Chief Samsumana and the registration of the Coalition for Change. Especially when the former Vice President openly narrated the events that led to the stalemate relationship with President Kororma which led to his controversial removal from the Office as the Vice President.
- The insinuation of the Government delay to fund NEC for the Elections- a circumstance that increased political tension around the meeting of the NEC’s deadline in conducting the elections.
- The delimitation of the electoral boundaries and the concerns expressed about the APC attempt to rig elections. This process delayed the electoral process as a result of the separation of some amalgamated chiefdoms and the creation of a new region (North West with three new districts).

The questionnaire thus ensure gender equality especially women and youth whose participation is very important in emerging democracies.

Theoretical Perspectives

The principal theory selected to discuss how and why radio is important in contemporary African

	Issues	Very satisfactory	Satisfactory	Can't tell	Unsatisfactory	Very unsatisfactory
1	<i>Educating voters on how to exercise their democratic rights</i>	35%	50%	0%	10%	5%
2	<i>Reporting on the development of an election campaign</i>	50%	40%	0%	5%	5%
3	<i>Providing a platform for the political parties and candidates to communicate their message to the electorate</i>	70%	25%	0%	5%	0%
4	<i>Providing a platform for the public to communicate their concerns, opinions, and needs, to the parties/candidates, the EMB, the government, and to other voters, and to interact on these issues</i>	55%	25%	0%	10%	5%
5	<i>Allowing the parties and candidates to debate with each other</i>	70%	20%	0%	5%	5%
6	<i>Scrutinizing the electoral process itself, including electoral management, in order to evaluate the fairness of the process, its efficiency, and its probity</i>	35%	50%	0%	10%	5%
7	<i>Providing information that, as far as possible, avoids inflammatory language, helping to prevent election-related violence.</i>	25%	40%	5%	20%	10%

democracy especially in the area of Elections reporting or coverage is the Democratic Participants Media theory. It focuses on the prevailing democratic, commercial and professional hegemony in media system. The theory challenges commercialization and monopolization of privately-owned media; it reacts against the centralism and bureaucratization of media institutions, as pointed out by McQuail. It emphasizes communitarianism, and encourages citizens' participation in community affairs. The dominance of mainstream mass media owned by private or public monopolies was the reason behind the emergence of "underground" publications during the 1960s and 1970s. The alternative media were technically made more efficient with the arrival of the Internet. This in the case of Radio Democracy is its ability to use ICTs to increase direct access and participation in its broadcasting. In this context radio⁵, mobile phones, smart phones and all devices that can be used conveniently by the ordinary citizens can effectively apply this theory of participation in democracy, without interference from government. Since technology is now available to all informed groups and persons even in poor countries. This theory holds that Citizens must be free to express opinions without government hindering or private interference or

surveillance, provided norms of personal, social and national safety and security.

Presentation of findings

1. How independent and informed were the discussions in the 'Gud Morning Salon' pertaining to the major events which precluded the 2018 Elections that were reported by Radio Democracy FM 98.1?

The data analysis shows that Radio Democracy served as a public sphere for all actors whose voice or views were relevant for informed debates on the issues that set the stage for free and fair elections in 2018. In terms of providing a platform for the political parties and candidates to communicate their message to the electorate's respondents thus rated 70% as very effective and 20% effective. In terms of providing a platform for the public to communicate their concerns, opinions, and needs, to the parties/candidates, the EMB, the government, and to other voters, and to interact on these issues, the data indicates that the Radio's performance was very satisfactory. The rating is as follows: 55% very satisfactory, 25% satisfactory as opposed to 10% unsatisfactory and 5% and very unsatisfactory.

⁵ <https://mediamagazine.in/content/democratic-participant-media-theory>

2. *To what extent was the programme participatory and inclusive of all stakeholders?*

The programme was satisfactorily participatory as evident in the data analysis. In terms of the allowing the political parties and their candidates to debate fearlessly the shows as follows: very satisfy as 70%, satisfactory 20%, while unsatisfactory is 5% and very unsatisfactory is 5%. The rating for scrutinizing the electoral process itself, including electoral management in order to evaluate the fairness of the process, its efficiency, and its probity; the rating shows as follows: very satisfactory 35%, satisfactory 50%, as opposed to unsatisfactory 10%, and very satisfactory 5%.

3. *How did the Programme contribute towards informed decision-making and conflict management?*

The programme was also done using professional techniques in terms of providing information that as far as possible which avoids inflammatory language, helping to prevent election-related violence. The rating is as follows: very satisfactory 25%, satisfactory 40% as opposed to unsatisfactory 20% and 10% very unsatisfactory.

The table showing the findings *Rating the performance of Radio Democracy FM 98.1 during the activities that prelude the 2018 Elections in Sierra Leone in terms of by:*

Testimonies

Mohamed Turay: I am an active member of the SLPP I am a frequent listener of the “Gud Moring Salon” because they are fearless in terms of asking questions and I have realized that politicians escape their conversations especially after the sacking of two set ministers of Social Welfare and Gender.

Zainab Mansaray: It was the Gud Morning Salone that helped to be part of the entire process based on their thematic discussions.

Musa Kamara: I am a trader who regularly listen Radio Democracy but they often reject my text messages which is why I question their fairness.

Recommendations

- The Station needs to conceptualize more programmes to increase and sustain its listenership beyond the ‘Gud Morning Salone’.
- They need to increase the mechanisms for audience participation.
- They need to improve on their capacity for effective and informed discussions on political issues.

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Social Media Impact on the events that Precluded the 2018 Elections in Sierra Leone

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Abstract

Different actors used Social media platforms in several ways during the just concluded elections in Sierra Leone. They were used to inform, educate and mobilize voters by political parties, politicians, the Election Management Bodies, civil society organizations, journalists and even development partners. They were further used to facilitate dialogue and create networks during the electoral cycle. However, these platforms were used also to attack, provoke and instigate violence, intimidate women, aspirants, political parties, politicians and so on.

This article sought to evaluate the impact of social media on political conversations and voters behaviors during the events that precluded the 2018 elections. Of primary interest were youths and civil society as they used social media for information, participation, political advertising, and education and conflict prevention mechanisms. The main social media platforms identified for this survey included WhatsApp and Facebook since these are widely used networks in Sierra Leone.

Background

Social media across the world have proven to be very effective in mobilizing people and public opinion to address social problems, whilst at the same time, they have a huge leverage in creating an empowered citizenry as a result of sharing real time happenings, especially in those areas like elections, wars, insurrections and demonstrations. In this context, these platforms have become part of the scholarly discussions dubbed as “Connective Actions” or the “Logic of Connective Actions.” It refers to a process wherein social networking

platforms are basically used to inform, educate and link people or communities together to accelerate common political agenda, which includes the formation of political parties or galvanizing support for political figures, pressure groups, or creating robust advocacy networks.

Those who can read and write or even have advanced skills in terms of exploring the Internet have started using other popular social media websites for political activism. One of these is YouTube that has surpassed other social media platforms on a massive scale in application and influence, and has recently begun to impact the way people seek out and use information, learn about the world, and share their own unique perspectives with an international audience.

These are all parts of the unfolding impact of new information and communication technologies which have increased the advancement and usage of hardware and the creation of plethora of software otherwise known as applications for political participation.

In reporting the elections in Sierra Leone as a case, several specialized software were developed including those designed to report the results. For example, the IRN Power House Apps in addition to several others even designed to access TV programs on mobile phones. Thus, new ICTs are now used for activating public sphere in contemporary democracy.

The 2018 Multitier Elections in Sierra Leone involved tremendous use of social media. This assertion is obvious since social media platforms were highly used to foster the dissemination of

information concerning the electoral activities and at the same time served as platforms for open conversations with politicians, political parties, security agencies, and the Elections Management Bodies with development partners. These platforms were also used by political parties to mobilize support for their candidates and to engineer political reforms agenda.

This article explored of social media on the activities that precluded the 2018 Elections in Sierra Leone. It mainly focused on the period stretching from the delimitation of electoral boundaries, the management of political parties' conventions, the elections or appointment of standard bearers, allocation of parties' symbols unto campaigns. The focus was on the type of conversation and information shared among youth, politicians and security agencies and how that impacting on the electoral process.

Problem Statement

The history of elections in Sierra Leone has been characterized by violence, intimidation and assault, not only against political opponents but the wider civil populace and, in most cases than not, has been marred by elections rigging and its accompanying vices.

However, and remarkably, Sierra Leone has been widely acclaimed for conducting free, fair and credible elections. The media have played a significant role in providing the enabling environment for the conduct of such accredited periodic elections since 2007 to date.

The proliferation of social media and the creative power of users' generated content is a threat to public security, privacy and political participation as observed in Sierra Leone. As more people connect to social media in Sierra Leone, the more the challenges of ensuring the correct use of social media platforms by the general citizenry are becoming clearly evident. Widespread misuse of the social media has the potential to throw this country into untoward situations that have far-reaching consequences to the peace and well-being of the citizens (Musa 2017). Even at this early stage of the advent of the social media in Sierra Leone, it's already clear that, if not used appropriately, social media could be a potent

vehicle to create both social and civil unrest in the country (Musa 2016). Incidences of social media-inspired revolutions abound in countries like Iran, Tunisia, Egypt, Syria and violent episodes in some parts of Europe; the huge destructions such actions caused in the respective countries are very glaring (Dewing 2012).

Because of the situation above, government is jittery about uncontrolled freedom everyone should enjoy because social media have the potential to spread hate speech and messages, political intimidations and unlawful intrusion of individual privacy.

Research Questions

1. How relevant were social media conversations for informed decision-making pertaining to the events leading to the 2018 Elections?
2. How useful were social media in terms of managing the conduct of youth and political parties during the pre-electoral activities of the 2018 elections
3. How did social media impact on the anti-social behavior of youth and political parties' behavior towards the 2018 Elections?

Objectives

1. To determine the relevance of social media conversations for informed decision-making pertaining to the events leading to 2018 Elections
2. To determine the effectiveness of social media in terms of managing violence in the conduct of youth and political parties during the pre-electoral activities of the 2018 Elections
3. To analyze social media impacted on anti-social behavior of youth and political parties' behavior?

Social Media as the Emerging Public Sphere

In her book, *The Political Power of Social Media: Technology, the Public Sphere and Political Change*, Professor Clay Shirky states that social media have become a global way of life

⁶ Cited in the unpublished PhD Thesis of Tonya Musa 2017

for civil society actors, citizens, non-governmental organizations, telecommunications companies, software providers, businesses and government Ministries, Departments and Agencies.

Social media can be generally understood as web-based services that build on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0, and “that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content⁷.” Social media are becoming increasingly attractive for users. It is a fast way to communicate ideas and can be a key source of information about how people interact. Today it is becoming the most influential communication channels. Media and communication research have proven that social media are important in accelerating or propelling national development. These platforms worldwide include several networking websites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, imo, LinkedIn, Blogs and Skype. However in Sierra Leone common social media platforms mainly use includes Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Imo and YouTube. Because of the easy way to use WhatsApp most literates and even illiterates have this Apps in their phones which they use by either exchanging text, audio, photo or video clips to each other or in groups (Chatora 2012).

Perhaps the most outstanding democratic feature of the social media is the fact that it provides for the citizens the much sought opportunity to express their thoughts, to criticize or praise a government without fear of arrest. The fact that most internet accounts do not have genuine address or real names makes it very difficult for the individuals to be dictated. Issues prevailing in our contemporary society suggest that on several occasions, such criticisms have been received by those in question, and in most cases, it ends up influencing their action in favour of the public (Edegoh. and Anunike 2016).

Methodology

This Survey targeted youth, journalists and political parties mainly in Western area who can access and have knowledge about the application of social media to participate in politics. So a Questionnaire was developed and distributed among 100 representatives of the target youth groups. These respondents were randomly

selected to fill the questionnaire since it is an exploratory study. So 25 practicing journalists were selected who are active users of social media, 40 youth activists were also selected from the following youth agencies (National Youth Coalition-NYC 10, All Political Parties Youth Association-APPA 10, the Center for Youth Coordinating Activities-CCYA 10 and the Aberdeen Youth Development Association-(AYDA) 10 and 35 youth representatives were selected from the membership of the National Elections Watch (NEW).

The Research Variables

Variables are the ingredients of every scientific study. So the main variables used for this work are **Age and Political Participation.**

Age – age bracket is an essential gender variable in exploring the access, participation or usage researches regarding new media more especially social media. It is obvious that young people are the main age brackets that are interested in new information communication technologies. Essentially this is the age bracket that that has demonstrated strong interest in adapting to ICTs for social change.

Age could further be used to classify both male and females using social media to be part of the Connective Logic, Election monitoring and reporting. This survey focused on those between ages 15-35, which is considered as the age brackets for youth in Sierra Leone.

Political Participation- the second variable used for this survey is political participation which is inclusive of political party membership, contesting for political positions, political reporting and analysis and formation of political networks.

Hence social media are widely perceived as the emerging democratic platforms that are attracting the meaningful and active participation of young people across the globe.

The questionnaire

A questionnaire was developed to solicit a quantitative data for this survey using five scale points with three sub-sections specially designed to seek the data that correspond to each of the three research objectives. Each of the research questions has sub questions or statements which

⁷ Klaus Bredl, Julia Hunniger and Jacob Linaa Jensen quoted from the Tonya Musa 2016

required the respondents to rate their feelings or experiences concerning the issues captured.

Presentation of data analysis

1. How relevant were social media conversations for informed decision-making pertaining to the events leading to the 2018 Elections?

The result of the data analyzed shows that social media platforms were very essential in terms of providing timely and useful information to all stakeholders throughout the electoral activities. Generally the information and education

as very effective and 50% being effective as compared to 5% as ineffective and 5% very ineffective.

2. How useful were social media in terms of managing the conduct of youth and political parties during the pre-electoral activities of the 2018 elections?

The data further shows the usefulness of social media platforms in alerting security agencies concerning the behaviors of youth and political parties in preventing conflict and violence in the

	Questions	Very effective	Effective	Can't tell	Ineffective	Very ineffective
1	<i>How relevant was WhatsApp conversation for informed decision making to get the standard bearers of political parties?</i>	30%	45%	0%	10%	15%
2	<i>How relevant were Facebook postings and comments for informed decision about the Presidential debate?</i>	40%	35%	0%	15%	10%
3	<i>How relevant were social media sources for main stream media in providing credible reports about the electoral process?</i>	20%	35%	15%	10%	20%
4	<i>How do you rate the participation of youth in social media platforms for an active involvement in the electoral processes?</i>	35%	35%	0%	15%	10%
5	<i>How do you rate NEC engagement of the public through social media?</i>	40%	50%	0%	5%	5%

accelerated the process of raising awareness on the roles and responsibilities of all major players that were involved in those strategic events that precluded the 2018 Elections. The respondents rated the effectiveness of the social media platforms regarding informed decision-making pertaining to the Presidential Debate that 45% very effective and as 30% effective. Specifically the Facebook postings and comments was rated 45% very effective and 30 effective. These platforms were also used for news gathering and reporting for mainstream media. Their relevance as credible news sources is 20% very effective and 35% being effective. At the same time the participation of young people in those activities through social media is rated by the respondents showing 35% very effective and 35% effective as opposed to 15% ineffective and 10% very ineffective respectively. Also NEC used to social media to engage the electorates. The rating shows that 40 %

events that precluded the Elections. The ratings are 20% very effective, 30 effective, 5% can't tell, 25% ineffective, and 25% very ineffective. Furthermore, Social media platforms were very strategic in reporting violent activities during the elections. The usefulness of social media platforms in terms of reporting and responding to incidence of violence was rated as follows: very effective 30%, effective 50% can't tell 0%, ineffective 10%, and very ineffective 10%.

3. How did social media impact the on anti-social behavior of youth and political parties' behavior towards the 2018 Elections?

The data shows that social media had significant impact on the behavior of youth especially during most of the events that preceded the 2018 Elections. So there was a question on whether or

not Social media promoted ethnicity; the responses were rated as follows: strongly agree 25%, 45%, can't tell 0%, disagree 20%, strongly disagree. Also social media increased deliberate malicious attacks as evident in the data: strongly agree 65% agree 25% and 5% disagree. The other anti-social issue rated is voter apathy.

The result shows as follows: strongly agree 30, agree 55, disagree 10 etc. in the area of social media amplifying hate speech the data shows as follow: strongly agree 30%, agree 55% and 15% disagree. The final rating was the impact of social media on women's participation. The data shows that social media discouraged women's participation as follows: strongly agree 25%, agree 45%, can't tell 0%,disagree 20% and strongly disagree 10% etc.

- The principal recommendation is media literacy which can enhance responsible and accountable use of social media especially in public elections.
- It is also very crucial to increase internet access in most rural areas in order to maximize rural connectivity and their presence online.
- Political parties should also ensure that social media are should not be used to ignite conflict or political intimidations.

Tables of key Findings

Determining the relevance of social media conversations for informed decision-making pertaining to the events leading to the Elections Determining the usefulness of social media in terms of managing the conduct of youth during the pre-electoral activities for the 2018 elections

Recommendations

	Questions	Very useful	Useful	Can't tell	Less useful	Not useful
5	<i>How useful were social media platforms for security alertness about youth behaviors to prevent conflict and violence?</i>	20%	30%	5%	25%	25%
6	<i>How useful were social media platforms in terms of reporting and responding to incidence of violence?</i>	30%	50%	0%	10%	10%

Analyzing social media impact on anti-social participation of youth and political parties

	Question	Strongly agree	Agree	Can't tell	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
7	<i>Social media promoted ethnicity</i>	25%	45%	0%	20%	10%
8	<i>Social media increased deliberate malicious attacks</i>	60%	30%	0%	5%	5%
9	<i>Social media increased the dissemination of fake news</i>	65%	25%	0%	5%	5%
10	<i>Social media increased voter apathy</i>	30%	10%	0%	40%	20%
11	<i>Social media amplified hate speech</i>	30%	55%	0%	10%	5%
12	<i>Social media discouraged women's participation</i>	25%	45%	0%	20%	10%

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“The result of the data analyzed shows that social media platforms were very essential in terms of providing timely and useful information to all stakeholders throughout the electoral activities. Generally the information and education accelerated the process of raising awareness on the roles and responsibilities of all major players that were involved in those strategic events that precluded the 2018 Elections.”

Media Institutions' Management of the Pre-Electoral Phase of the March 2018 Elections: A Case Study of the Media Reform Coordinating Group (MRCG)

By

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Abstract

Several media organisations and institutions in Sierra Leone engaged in a lot of planning on how to approach the coverage and reportage of all phases of the 2018 Presidential and General Elections. Whether it was the Media Reform Coordinating Group (MRCG), Independent Radio Network (IRN), Search for Common Ground/Talking Drum Studio or BBC Media Action, one thing stood out, the development of a roadmap that portrayed how they intended to manage their elections project.

This article examined how one of the media institutions approached the planning and execution of its programmes in the pre-electoral stage. It investigated the operations of the MRCG as a case study to see how it collectively planned and rolled out programmes during the pre-elections phase together with its nine constituent organisations. Methodologically, documentary and archival search were done on the work of the MRCG.

The study provided a framework for the review of the media's preparedness and actual implementation of pre-elections programmes with a view to ascertaining their successes and challenges. The study also suggested ways in which media's operations will be better coordinated and executed in the future.

Key words: elections, media and elections, media management of elections, pre-elections.

Introduction

No institution- be it religious, educational, industrial, media, business- and the like succeeds without planning, strategy and control (Findlay, 2010). In short, this means that they should have a management system. Jones and George (2003) assert that “management may be defined as planning, organising, leading, and controlling of human resources to achieve organisational goals effectively and efficiently” (p. 5). This definition can be applied to media's management of elections.

Traditionally, the management of multiparty democratic elections has not been newsworthy and kept under low profile compared to other political activities. The accomplishment of many electoral processes largely passed unnoticed, except by those directly influenced like the losing political parties when they set their complaints against the election conduct and results. However, this situation began to change within the last twenty five years. The administrative details of democratic elections started to be perceived and reported as a central issue to measure; the rights of individuals to vote and participate in governance, sustainability and transparency of democratic process, transitions from authoritarianism, reconciliation, conflict resolution... etc. Electoral management came to be more closely scrutinized by political parties, media and by international and domestic election observers (Dundas, 1993, quoted in Al Musbeh, 2011).

Recent years have seen a considerable increase in elections being held around the world. Numerous countries emerging from conflict or from authoritarian regimes are looking to elections as a

positive step towards democratic governance. Established democracies also continuously seek to optimise the way they manage elections, as modern technologies provide new mechanisms for improvements in citizen participation and electoral administration. Electoral administrators are faced with immense operational tasks in often challenging political environments. It is increasingly recognised that solid professional knowledge and skills are required to manage electoral processes effectively. The international community is introducing global standards and examples of best practices for effective and accountable elections management are accumulating.⁸ Organising an election, however, is a huge logistical task. It requires the careful management of complex technology, ballot boxes, people, resources and the communication of information to the public.⁹

Electoral Management

Electoral management is therefore the careful management of technology, employees, resources, the relationships between stakeholder organisations and the communication of information to the public.¹⁰

Media management of elections

The management of elections is not only limited to Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs). The communication of information to the public is within the province of media institutions. While the media in Sierra Leone have in the past mainly relied on the National Electoral Commission (NEC) for programmes and activities on covering and reporting on the phases of the electoral processes, there have a significant shift in recent times. Prior to the 2018 elections, the media institutions in the country developed programmes and activities on how they could play their roles in the electoral processes. The media institutions have arguably come to the realisation of the important role they can play in democratic elections.

⁸ <https://www.public-admin.co.uk/programmes/managing-elections-techniques-and-perspectives/>

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ <http://www.electoralmanagement.com/what-is-electoral-management/>

Free media have long been recognized as a cornerstone of democracy and play an important role in influencing political discourse during elections. When free and balanced, traditional media (print and broadcast) foster transparency and the dissemination of important electoral information. The rise of new media – such as social media sites, blogs, email and other new media platforms – provides further avenues and possibilities for participatory citizenship, information and knowledge sharing, and inclusion and empowerment. Both traditional and new media can play a vital watchdog role, and serve as a campaign platform, a forum for public debate and as a public educator, ultimately strengthening democracy (Samer and Gallagher 2015).

There is little doubt that the media play an indispensable role in the proper functioning of a democracy. The most obvious role of the media in a democracy is that of a “watchdog.” By undertaking careful scrutiny and disclosure of the functioning of the government and various arms of the state, as well as the performance of elected representatives, the media can arm the public with the information necessary to evaluate the sincerity and effectiveness of the people they elect into power and to hold them to account (Joseph, 2011).

In managing elections, Joseph (2011) continued, the media play three critical roles:

1. First, they provide information about the election to citizens. Since people’s awareness about the election depends to a large extent on media content, journalists must report factually and fairly on the platforms and campaigns of all the participating political parties and/or candidates so that the electorate can differentiate between them and make informed decisions. The media must also provide interpretation and analysis of events and issues, often by creating space for the diverse opinions of a range of columnists and commentators. Another important task involves passing on information from the election commission to educate citizens on the basic facts and process of elections.

2. Secondly the media function as watchdogs on behalf of the public, keeping close tabs on the election campaign and the voting process. It is the

media's job to report on any violations of the rights of candidates or voters (including the right to free speech), any corruption in election and voting procedures, any misdemeanour by political parties, and/or any sins of omission or commission by the election management authorities.

3. And, thirdly, the media need to serve as the voice of the voters. Elections are not just for politicians; they are, notably, an opportunity for ordinary people to speak up, to identify the issues they think need highlighting and why. Journalists must go out into the community to seek and provide a forum for the voices of ordinary voters who have something to say, especially those who hesitate to voice their opinions on public matters in the public sphere or have been ignored or even prevented from doing so in the past (Joseph, 2011).

Unfortunately, Friguglietti (2014) quoted in IDEA (2015) notes that the media are sometimes seen as little more than a PR tool. International electoral assistance providers in some parts of the developing world have a 'real lack of understanding' of media development, and view media development organizations as little more than 'contractors' that can help with public relations. Some such organizations have 'little interest in engaging in discussions about building trust at the local level and the potential to impact development outcomes'.

Findings

The Media Reform Coordinating Group (MRCG) began its strategic planning for the elections in 2016. By that time, the institution developed key programmes and activities, which it wanted to undertake for the elections initially slated for 2017, but was eventually held in March, 2018.

The MRCG's approach to the elections was under what was called 'Promoting Professional Media Coverage and Conflict Sensitive Reporting of the 2018 Multi-Tier Elections in Sierra Leone' funded by the United Nations Development Fund (UNDP) under its Conflict Prevention and Mitigation during the Electoral Cycle in Sierra Leone project (CPM project).

During the pre-electoral phase, MRCG managed programmes and activities that focused on training of media practitioners and establishing a media situation room.

The trainings which were on Conflict Sensitive Reporting covered the first and biggest component of MRCG's elections work. That component of the institution's work enhanced and strengthened the skills of about 500 local journalists (including editors and station managers) from regional media houses in Sierra Leone to provide them with the necessary skills for professional media coverage and conflict sensitive reporting of the 2018 multi-tier elections in Sierra Leone.

The participants were taught about the role of media amid conflict, either how it they could possibly prolong or exacerbate a conflict, and their role in preventing conflict and promoting reasoned political dialogue. Additionally, they were taught methods of conflict sensitive reporting and how to effectively and professionally report on the electoral cycles and adherence to the Independent Media Commission's (IMC) Guidelines on Reporting Elections.

A total of four trainings were organised targeting 500 Journalists, Editors and Stations Managers. The trainings were held in Kenema, Bo, Makeni and Waterloo between December 2017 and January, 2018.

A total of 490 participants took part in the four trainings; in Keneme (Eastern Region), 18% were females and 82% males, in Bo (Southern Region) 33% were females and 67% males, in Makeni (Northern Region) 40% were females and 60% males, and in Waterloo (Western Area Rural) 38% were females and 62% males.

In all the four workshops combined, over 90% of the participants stated that the trainings were useful and they enabled them to do conflict sensitive reporting of the 2018 elections.

Two sets of training manuals were developed, revised and distributed to participants.

The work done by MRCG in this area, largely resonates with the media's role in elections. Joseph (2011) for instance notes that the media

can encourage full, informed public participation in elections in a number of other ways:

1. By educating the voters on how to exercise their democratic rights
2. By reporting on the conduct and progress of the election campaign
3. By providing a platform for political parties to communicate their messages to the electorate, and vice versa
4. By enabling parties to debate with each other
5. By monitoring vote casting and counting
6. By scrutinising the electoral process to evaluate its fairness, efficiency and probity
7. By reporting and analysing results

In the MRCG's trainings, participants were taught the following:

1. Covering and Reporting Elections,
2. Conflict sensitive reporting
3. Legal frameworks on Elections
4. Guidelines on Elections Reporting in Sierra Leone (IMC Code of Practice)
5. Safety and Protection of Journalists
6. Dealing with Hate Speech, Fake News and Social Media
7. Managing Information and Expectations in Elections
8. Reporting on Women and Persons with Disabilities
9. Commitment to professional media coverage and conflict sensitive reporting on the electoral process.

Another area covered by the MRCG had to do with what was called a Media Situation Room. It was set up to track the media's coverage and reportage of the electoral processes in Sierra Leone. The Media Situation Room was to monitor the media's performance during the 2018 Multi-tier Elections. It relied mainly on raw information from print and broadcast media contents from around the country by media monitors (40 of them trained for the purpose). The raw data were processed and analysed to provide real-time information on the performance of the media in dealing with conflict sensitive issues even at the pre-elections phase. The data collected showed the

media coverage on the electoral processes and their adherence to ethical standards.

Conclusion

The media are not the only source of information available to voters but, in a world dominated by mass communications, they have come to determine political agendas across the globe. This reality is reflected in the fact that election observation teams now generally include media access and election coverage among the criteria used to judge whether or not the conduct of elections was fair. At the same time, it has become common practice to monitor the media during election periods to determine whether or not their coverage of the polls was fair. Both are obviously important for the democratic process to work. There is clearly a symbiotic relationship between the media and democracy (Joseph, 2011). The roadmap to effective and efficient media's management is still in its embryonic stage in Sierra Leone, particularly in the area of media monitoring and adhering to self-regulation mechanisms. However, the stage is set for a more efficient and effective media management of all phases in the electoral processes in the country's democratic journey.

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“There is clearly a symbiotic relationship between the media and democracy (Joseph, 2011). The roadmap to effective and efficient media’s management is still in its embryonic stage in Sierra Leone, particularly in the area of media monitoring and adhering to self-regulation mechanisms. However, the stage is set for a more efficient and effective media management of all phases in the electoral processes in the country’s democratic journey.”

Media Impact and Audience Predisposition: Prelude to the 2018 Elections

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Abstract

Agenda-Setting research, in general has shown that the media help set social and political agendas (Mccombs and Shaw, 1972). This body of research has further shown that the media select, define, emphasize and amplify issues and that the public and policy makers learn from the media about the relative importance of issues (Mccombs and Shaw, 1972: show and Mccombs, 1977: Trumbo, 1995).

In the context of the above Theory, the Media in Sierra Leone has strategically positioned itself in influencing both the Public “electorate and the government prelude to the 2018 March 7th Presidential and Parliamentary elections.

Prior to the 2018 elections, many teething issues were floated by the media with the sole aim of redesigning the state interms of the pre-disposition of the electorates when it comes to general elections in Sierra Leone.

Two main political parties have been dominating the political landscape in the country hence the 2018 general election is no exception.

There has always been this reverberation for a ‘third force’ by the mainstream media to create a balance of power in the body polity of Sierra Leone hence the media has been restless in achieving this drive through the Agenda Setting Construct.

INTRODUCTION

What makes Sierra Leoneans vote the way they always vote in general elections? There has been a consistent pattern of voting by the Sierra Leonean

electorates since post-independence in 1961. The predisposition voters have always largely been drawn from Regional Consideration and tribal inclination.

Sierra Leone has been designed in such a way that your qualifications/capacity counts very little when it comes to elections.

Regardless your public stature, as long as you are coming from a certain region and you happen to be awarded a symbol from a particular party dominance in that specific region, you are highly likely to win regardless your manifesto.

Therefore this Article tries to seek the views of Media Stakeholders in the country who invariably set the agenda to influence more especially swing voters who remain indecisive even on polling day.

The issue of swing voting is then brought to an environment where voters are rarely considered persuadable.

Who is a Swing Voter?

The intuitive understanding of a swing voter is an individual who is persuadable and “up for grab”.

In Sierra Leone, there are certain Regions and Districts that are always categorized as swing Regions or swing Districts as the case may be. For instance, Western Area and Kono Districts in the East of Sierra Leone are critical examples.

Historically, the Western Area/ Freetown has always gone red albeit the green under the late President Kabba between 1996 to 2002 Western Area/Freetown went green.

Kono District historically has been a red and green affair depending who controls the central government. But predominantly it has been green most of the times under multi-party democracy.

WHAT'S THE MEDIA IMPACT

Because most researchers and political pundits can easily predict the voting pattern in Sierra Leone, the media this time round attempted to change the trajectory.

However, several key Media Stakeholders views were sounded prior to the March 7th 2018 General Elections.

The President of the Reporters Union who also works for Star Television, Amadu Lamarana Bah had this to say: he said the media was well positioned prior to the 2018 general elections; at least the media played a significant role especially for the bigger parties that have the resources to market their agenda and flagship programs. He said more money was spent by the Sierra Leone's People's Party than the All People's Congress Party during the run-off. According to Mr. Bah, the SLPP were more focused propagating their free education programme and the new direction whilst APC were focusing on propaganda and defending their Stewardship. As a result, the increase in advertorials helped shaped the voting pattern of especially the swing voters who were also unpersuadable. Conversely, the media by creating impact on the predisposition voters in turn made quiet substantial profit from advertorials. Other TV Stations aside Star TV also provided platforms for other parties to market their flagship programs and policies to the electorate.

The Reporters Union President concluded by affirming that the ban on public transport and vehicle movements also contributed to the not to impressive turn-out especially in the run-off compared to turn-out in the first rounds.

Mathew Kanu, Lecturer University of Makeni, department of Mass Communication: on his part, also reaffirmed that indeed the media especially the electronic media had an impact on the elections.

Mr. Kanu's focus was more on radio and TV Stations and in the Rural Township and Makeni in particular where he lives.

He said the people in the Rural Areas can easily relate and listen to radio and in essence they can analyze contents which invariably can inform their decision when it comes to voting. He furthered that hence radio has now become ubiquitous, especially in the Rural Areas where majority of the people cannot read or write, radio has become a reliable medium for them when it comes to analyzing the news being aired in the various community Radio Stations.

Though Mr. Kanu's focus was mainly on Radio, he did not pay much attention to other forms/modes of traditional media associated mainly with rural inhabitants.

For instance, traditional modes of communication in Rural Area have more advantage compared to the modern Mass Media. The simple reason being that the Rural people are more familiar and comfortable with the traditional modes of communication because it is closer to them at the grassroots level hence it influence on swing voters and the un decided should not be underestimated.

Tiana Alpha President, Women in the Media (WIMSAL)

According to Ms. Alpha, the Media has little or no impact on audience predisposition when it comes to issues relating to women. She accused the media of not doing much to change the mindset of women in political parties to support their women folk who were contesting for elective positions in the 2018 March 7th General elections. Ms. Alpha charged that no issues based approach were discussed hence the men were more empowered to muzzle their female political opponents. The media failed to mainstream women issues and that created negative impact in the run-off up to the elections.

Ahmed Sesay, producer, Radio Democracy 98.1 spoke in the affirmative when asked whether the media has made any impact on audience predisposition prelude to the 2018 general elections.

On his part, radio was key in selling the agenda around issues in the last elections. He said radio 98.1 collaborated a lot with civil societies given them platform to discuss those issues that are pertinent to voters. Civil societies like National Elections Watch NEW and particularly the Institute for Governance Research IGR used Radio to educate voters/audience on myriad of studies all in an effort to influence audience predisposition on the 2018 election, he concluded.

National Presidential Debate:

For the first time, all the key Presidential Candidates were seated under one canopy to respond to social issues and many other governance issues put to them and watched and listened to by almost all eligible voters around the country.

For the first time again, the entire country came to a standstill just to watch that episode of a debate and history making all in a bid to hold the Presidential nominees accountable after the elections. According to a Senior Journalists who was part of the civil society consortium that organized the debate said; “The outcome of this debate will largely inform the electorate to vote for their preferred choice during the elections. To underpin his point, the debate ended peacefully, end there were arguments everywhere as if it was a football match were a winner was announced.

Key Terms

- Swing voter: In Mayer’s 2007, 359) words, a swing voter is one “Who is to solidly committed to one candidate or the

other as to make all efforts of persuasion futile.”

Conclusions

This Article attempts to establish through key media Stakeholders who were and always key drivers in election education and also change drivers in influencing voters in their predisposition standpoint prior to the 2018 general elections.

In all of this, it is now obvious that the media played key role in influencing predisposition voters, particularly in the just concluded general elections.

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Tiana Alpha; President, “Women in the Media, Sierra Leone

Mathew Kanu; Lecturer, University of Makeni, UNIMAK

Amadu Lamarana Bah; Presenter STAR TV and President, Reporters Union, Sierra Leone

Media, Creating the Platform for Women: A Prelude to the 2018 Elections in Sierra Leone

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Abstract

Sierra Leone undertakes elections to ensure that the democratic rights of its citizens are reflected in the nation's political decision-making process. Citizens reserve the right to vote for their elected representatives and also participate fully in the electioneering process. Media however, have proven to be key partners in facilitating the smooth flow of the process. They create the platform for deliberation of issues; enhancing clear understanding of each step employed within the process. Suffice it to say, the mass media are the most vital organs to disseminate news and other relevant information during this phase of governance. They have a responsibility to not only provide the platform, but to ensure that accountable and sustainable structures are put in place. It is the duty of the media to ensure that the ideologies of political parties are published, by so doing, the opportunity to scrutinize political party leaders is made available to the public. In all of this, media are expected to uphold the responsibility to be fair in creating this platform.

Most often however, critics in Sierra Leone have attacked the media for not giving women fair coverage during electioneering period. The criticisms also range from media stereotyping of women, to negative portrayal of women in the media. Others say that "media fail to articulate women's full potentials by portraying their participation at different layers of society"¹¹ (James, 2015) and some even go to the extent of accusing the media of being "damaging" than "good" in terms of helping women to get to positions they aspire for. (Schnall, 2013) However,

to understand the interrelation between the Sierra Leone media and women pre 2018 elections, this article examines various media efforts to create the platform for women's political participation in the run up to the democratic elections in Sierra Leone. It presents the challenges faced by the media in this vein and proffers recommendations for a gender responsive media.

Media Creating the Platform for Women

UNESCO underscore the point that there is a meeting point between women's empowerment and media development, adding that "While inequalities and gender stereotypes exist in social structures and the minds of people, media have the potential to propagate and perpetuate or to ameliorate these."¹² As the Sierra Leone media progress in terms of structure and professionalism articulating the needs of the various groups in society, and creating the platform for the disadvantaged is critical to enhance and sustain development in the sector.

In the run up to the elections, Women in the Media Sierra Leone (WIMSAL) an organization for women journalists, with support from West Minster Foundation for Democracy and the UN Women organized a nationwide training for print and electronic media journalists. The training was for the journalists to gain a greater understanding on gender driven responsive reporting during the elections. Also the organization, taking into consideration that the representation of women in politics is of concern nationwide, took that up as part of their advocacy drive as a pressure group and made a collective effort to "advocate for the empowerment of women and their active

¹¹ Sierra Leone State of the Media Report 2015. **Gender Representation in the Media: A review of the Status of Women in the Media; Progress, Obstacles & Challenges to Women's Empowerment.** James, W.P.R.O.

¹² Gender Sensitive Indicators for Media, UNESCO (2012, p15)

participation in decision making processes at all levels”¹³, in the lead up to the March 2018 general and local elections. They organised a one-day symposium targeting women leaders and candidates from various political parties. The theme of the programme was ‘Strengthening Democracy, Promoting Women’s Participation and Inclusion in the March 2018 Elections.’ WIMSAL also collaborated with the UNDP to undertake a three-month public and media advocacy on promoting peace in the various phases of the electioneering process. President WIMSAL, Tiana Alpha said the move was geared towards engaging communities for women to serve as peace ambassadors. She confessed that the venture created an experience sharing platform for aspirants which further enhanced the campaign on increasing women’s representation in the political process.

In the lead up to the general elections in March 2018, the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), the umbrella body for journalists in Sierra Leone, with support from a consortium of Civil Society partners, made a landmark stride in giving support to women through the various debates organized not only for women but for youths and presidential aspirants who happened to be mostly men.

The media through the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) and key partners organized professional, “all-inclusive and successful debates” that met the expectations and priorities of the populace. The media’s role was to create both a platform and a vehicle (through its media professionals and institutions) to put together independent and credible teams of professionals that led the process of organizing the debates. (Presidential Debate Concept Note, 2018) The media did not only create the platform, but with assistance from other partners, provided training for both the women and youth candidates who participated in those debates.

Apart from the general Presidential, Women’s and Youth Debates, a few individual broadcast media institutions¹⁴ gave free airtime to women political

candidates to articulate their intentions to the wider populace. The male political aspirants were not that fortunate as they had to pay for their sessions at those radio stations. Also, a small number of print media institutions made efforts to give space to publishing stories on women candidates without requesting money from them. Others actually assigned reporters to faraway places like the provincial areas of Kono, Kailahun and other places in the North, specifically to go out and source for stories on women. These and many other efforts were put in place by some media houses, at no cost to the women, all to create the platform to strengthen women’s participation towards the March 2018 elections.

Issues & Challenges

Media effort to open up their space and create the platform for women candidates during the pre-elections period was met with numerous challenges. Journalists from various media institutions recounted their ordeal. Samuel Wise Bangura of the AYV Media Empire said;

“At the initial stage of covering the elections, we drafted a policy with the political parties on how we were going to cover the elections. The [criterion that was] given to us by the political parties was that we should always contact their secretariat if we wanted to get anybody from the party to comment on issues; even those that had to do with the aspirations of women. When we asked for interviewees from the secretariats they would always send men to discuss instead of women. Even when we were discussing issues relating to constituencies where women were aspiring for seats, men were sent to be interviewed. We were very much limited in getting women. Even the CSOs when it had to do with politics they would shy away from the conversation, and only few of them were always willing to be interviewed. With the women political party candidates, the perception was that they were operating under a system and [that] system [made] decisions for them.”¹⁵ (Bangura, 2018)

Bangura (2018) attempted to provide an explanation as to why he thought political parties always sent men instead of women to be interviewed. He said, “the myth is that the women were not up to the task to articulate the views of

¹³ See: WIMSAL Report, (2018 p2) presented at the SLAJ 2018 Annual General Meeting

¹⁴ Africa Young Voice Media Empire- AYV on Sunday Programme, Radio Democracy FM 98.1 Breakfast Show, Skyy Radio FM 106 – Skyy Women’s World programme and so on.

¹⁵ Interview with Samuel Wise Bangura of Africa Young Voice Media Empire, in Freetown.

their political parties. [Women] were only given symbols because the [political parties] needed more votes.”

Another disheartening issue Bangura (2018) noted was the fact that there were times when AYV reporters went to some parts of the provinces (specifically the North) to carry out interviews, women were not allowed to speak. The men would tell the reporters to speak to them instead, or even ask their permission (the men) for the women to be granted interviews. The following are more challenges noted by other journalists:

- Women were fearful to talk in town hall meetings, so they were mostly not captured during media coverage of those meetings.
- Most women had to get permission from their husbands before they made decisions. This hampered the stories of journalists who needed immediate interviews.
- Most women aspirants did not appear at radio stations for interviews. This disrupted planned programmes at various media institutions, especially the broadcast institutions.
- Some of the women aspirants especially those who went in for the local council elections, were not sure they understood the task they were undertaking.
- Most women aspirants especially those aspiring for local councils in the rural areas were scared at the mere appearance of reporters.

Criticisms against the Media

Some women still hold the view that “the media in Sierra Leone contribute to tear apart women aspirants.” Alpha (2018)¹⁶ explained that the complaints she got from the interviews she undertook with some women candidates aspiring for parliamentary seats were that “the Sierra Leone media continue to portray women in a negative light and do not give much visibility to women candidates.” Prof. Pede Hollist, Fulbright scholar and writer who was engaged in a pre - 2018 election research on the representation of women in newspapers in Sierra Leone, explained that women were mostly presented in a “motherly role” in most reports published by some newspapers. This stereotypical portrayal of women lend credence to the criticisms that media face globally, for failing to articulate women’s full potentials by portraying their participation at the different layers of society. Media have constantly concentrated mainly on the role women play domestically.

A very strong criticism against the Media in the lead up to the election was the fact that they did not give space to any woman presidential aspirant in the Presidential Debate. There were two female presidential aspirants one from the Unity Party and the other from the Revolutionary United Front party. The organizers¹⁷ explained that both candidates fell short of the criteria for inclusion. Many say that affirmative action should have been taken, considering that at the time of selection, Femi Claudius Cole of the Unity Party, was the only woman in the race whose party had nominated her.

The President of the Women in the Media Sierra Leone (WIMSAL), Tiana Alpha also decried the media for the “limited amount of coverage given to women aspirants.” She said it was blatant especially within the newspaper industry. Some newspaper outlets confessed to not even publishing any story on women aspirants or candidates during the electioneering period.

The Way Forward

It is essential for the media to “reflect diversity in society”¹⁸ if they are to develop. If media are to

¹⁶ Interview with Tiana Alpha in May 2018, for this article.

¹⁷ Presidential Debate Committee 2018

¹⁸ Gender Sensitive Indicators for Media, UNESCO (2012, p15)

provide the nation with comprehensive, diverse and effective coverage, they have to reflect the society in which they operate, in terms of the language used and the culture they project. All of this has to go beyond the stereotypical pattern presenting a male dominated society, even though men occupy majority of the strategic positions globally. (UNESCO, 2012) As a result of the forgoing, the media in Sierra Leone needs to focus on women as a separate group in development to enable them leverage power when contending with their male counterparts in politics and every other form of leadership.

Also there is the need for women's organizations to make a concerted effort to engage the media in designing the path to ensuring effective visibility for women in leadership. In doing that, women must note that the media cannot always create a free platform for them. Media running costs are getting higher by the day, and considering the poverty in the Sierra Leone media, media managers are focused on getting the required remuneration for use of their platforms.

On the part of the media, training of journalists would be a key strategy to help promote social acceptance of women's political participation. Currently, there is a fundamental lack of understanding of the significance of gender dimensions in various spheres of the media in Sierra Leone. Most journalists have no understanding whatsoever of the concept of gender and so the majority of them are gender blind. This gender blindness leads journalists to only focus on event-based reporting rather than doing critical analyses and investigative pieces on the essence of having more women in politics and the needs of women who strive to succeed in the political arena. The media in Sierra Leone, through the SLAJ, must consider crafting a gender policy that would guide journalists in their daily quest to source for and disseminate information. Individual media houses should also endeavour to have their own in-house gender policy. This gender policy will have among other things, clauses on how to handle women's issues not only within media entities but also for those women accessing the media. Journalists must also receive trainings in Gender Reporting and other gender related emerging issues so that creating the platform for those issues would be easy. Journalists must be trained to understand the

importance of gender considerations and should be sensitive enough to monitor the participation of women; women's equal participation must be ensured at every phase of programming. They must be able to pick out barriers to women's participation in the process and have the willingness to fairly report their findings to the electorate.(Hubbard, n.d) .

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The Repeal of Criminal and Seditious Libel Laws: What did the Political Parties say?

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Abstract

This article examined the manifestoes of Sierra Leone's three leading political parties, the All Peoples Congress (APC), the National Grand Coalition (NGC) and the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), ahead of the Presidential and Parliamentary elections in March 2018. It made specific reference to the 'position' of the political parties on the repeal of the criminal and seditious libel laws in the country. The repeal of the over fifty-year old laws has been a key issue within the human rights community and the journalism fraternity. The Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) has been calling for the repeal of those laws, which it described as 'repressive.' The paper undertook a documentary search and review of the parties' manifestoes. It used the libertarian theory to argue that the use of the criminal and seditious libel laws continues to violate the principles of freedom of expression, and undermines the country's democratic credentials. The study found out that although all the three major parties made some sort of reference to the repeal of the laws and improving the standard of journalism in the country, only the SLPP directly and explicitly committed itself to repealing the seditious libel law if it won the elections.

Keywords

Criminal libel, seditious libel, manifestoes, All Peoples Congress (APC), Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) and National Grand Coalition (NGC).

Introduction

The year 2017 ended without an actualisation of a dream of almost all journalists, friends, well-wishers, supporters and proponents of freedom of expression and of the press. It was a dream to see the realisation of President Ernest Koroma's promise to either "repeal" or "review" Part V of the Public Order Act of 1965, which criminalises free speech, during his tenure. Part V of the Public Act of 1965, which is still being used to regulate the media in Sierra Leone, creates three separate offences of 'false publication', 'criminal libel' and 'seditious libel.' Those laws in the words of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) hinder press freedom and the growth of the media industry in the country.

Prior to the release of the manifestoes of the political parties, there was a major national consultative conference in September, 2016 where various stakeholders converged at the Miatta Conference Hall, Youyi Building in Freetown to discuss the reform of Part V of the Public Order Act (POA) of 1965. At the end of that conference, all the stakeholders unanimously agreed that criminal libel and seditious libel laws should be repealed and replaced with alternatives that will guarantee and protect the rights and reputations of citizens.

Theoretical Framework

Freedom of expression and freedom of opinion have been cornerstones of liberal democracies for centuries. Starting with the 1689 English Bill of Rights to the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights [UDHR], they have been enshrined and extended in constitutional and international law (Kamara, 2016, p.1). The "grund norm" of recognition of the right to freedom of expression and opinion is anchored in the current Constitution of Sierra Leone, Act. 6 of 1991. This Constitution is significant in that it re-established a multi-party system and recognized certain Fundamental Human Rights in favor of the individual. Particularly, Section 25 provides in no uncertain terms the right to freedom of expression [and the press] (Kamara, 2016, pp.4-5).

Section 25 (1) of the Constitution of Sierra Leone, Act. No 6 of 1991 which grants freedom of

expression and the press, limits the enjoyment of the same freedom in Section 25 (2) in the interest of defence, public safety, public order, public morality or public health; or for the purpose of protecting the reputations, rights and freedoms of other persons, preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence among others.

Notwithstanding the purport of those limitations or restrictions, media practitioners and other organisations believe that the country's criminal libel law provisions do not conform to any democratically accepted limitations to freedom of expression and of the press. Massaquoi (2014) described the 1965 Public Order Act of Sierra Leone (POA) as a legislation designed to regulate those behaviors of the citizens of Sierra Leone and other residents assumed to be counterproductive to the stability of the State and comfort of others.

The Libertarian theory promotes the idea of a free press, a press that is free from all forms of control. The school of thought that believes in this theory, holds the view that the media should be free from control by government or other powerful interests, sufficient to allow them to report and express freely and independently and to meet the needs of their audiences. The libertarian system allows the media editorial autonomy in an open competitive atmosphere.

The right to freedom of expression is guaranteed and restricted/limited under international law and human rights instruments, notably the Universal Declaration of Human Rights UDHR, (1948), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), the European Convention on Human Rights, the American Convention on Human Rights (1969), and the African Charter on Human and Peoples Right (1987).

Jamiru (2016) noted that Sections 26, 27, and 33 of the Public Order Act No. 46 of 1965 are instructive statutory regimes relating to criminal libel. Whilst Sections 26 and 27 criminalize what is defamatory libel; Section 33 seeks to penalize defamation with a seditious intent. He noted that "journalists have been greatly caught up in shark-infested waters due to the unforgiving take by state authorities and private persons alike." There has been an avalanche of suits against newspaper

proprietors, publishers, editors or any person responsible for publication of a newspaper.

Emmanuel Saffa Abdulai at the launch of the Society for Democratic Initiative's 2016 State of the Media Report titled: "The Independence of the Media Enhances Democracy and Good Governance: A call for the repeal of the Criminal and Seditious Libel laws in the 1965 Public Order Act" said "We believe that a journalist should not go to jail for writing and publishing stories.... The practice of journalism could only be enhanced through a civil libel law...."

In his speech on World Press Freedom Day, 3 May 2016, the President of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), Kevin Lewis, said in Sierra Leone the continued presence and use of the Criminal Libel laws is a constant threat of the right to media freedom, which is a fundamental human right. SLAJ reiterated its call to President Koroma, to make do his 8-year-old election promise, to repeal the Criminal Libel Laws. "We continue to maintain that there are enough provisions in the Civil Laws to address any redress sought from those aggrieved by our work..."

What the Political Parties Say in their Manifestoes?

The Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP)

The SLPP document was dubbed the 'New Direction-People's Manifesto'. It contained a section called "**Promoting Press Freedom and Strengthening Civil Society Organisations (CSOs).**" It noted that under the '**Situation Analysis**' section that the Fourth Estate has been very useful in informing and educating the public on governance issues. Since 2002, there has been a proliferation of press houses and radio stations. The Independent Media Commission (IMC) was established with responsibility to enforce professional ethics in journalism. The greatest challenges presently facing the Fourth Estate are the continued existence of the seditious libel law, the absence of Freedom of Information (FOI), limited capacity of journalists, uninformed and unethical reporting....(p. 71).

Under the **‘Challenges’** section, the Manifesto stated that “The last SLPP Government set up the Independent Media Commission (IMC) and charged it with the task of regulating and monitoring media institutions in order to ensure that they operate in a way that promotes the public good. However, the IMC has failed to enforce its own ethics and like most democratic institutions, it has not escaped political interference from the APC...” (p.71).

On this issue, the manifesto stated under the **‘New Direction’** section that the next SLPP administration will “Repeal the seditious libel law” and “Adopt policies and laws to develop the capacity of journalists” (p.72).

The All Peoples Congress (APC)

The APC document was labelled ‘Governing for the Grassroots- Moving Forward With Dr Samura Kamara- Manifesto of the All People’s Congress (APC) 2018’. Under the section on **‘Moving Forward with Science, Technology and Innovation’**, the party committed itself to “Enhancing professional journalism and citizen-journalism through support for training, capacity building and progressive reforms relating to journalism and freedom of expression” (p.32).

National Grand Coalition (NGC)

The NGC document was called ‘Manifesto 2018, An Agenda for Job Creation and National Prosperity.’ Under the **‘Strengthening Press Freedom & Access to Information’** section, the document noted that Sierra Leone’s Constitution guarantees freedoms of speech and the press, although these rights are sometimes restricted in practice. Under the Public Order Act of 1965, criminal defamation is punishable by prison terms of three to seven years, while the separate crime of publishing false news is punishable by up to two years in prison. The 2013 Right to Access Information Act includes penalties for government agencies that fail to comply with its provisions on information requests. Media in Sierra Leone are regulated by the IMC, whose members are appointed by the president on the advice of the Sierra Leone Association of

Journalists (SLAJ) and subject to the approval of Parliament, according to the Independent Media Commission Act (IMC) of 2000 as amended in 2006 and 2007. The IMC provides an alternative to litigation under the Public Order Act; aggrieved parties can register complaints with the commission, which grants them a hearing. If the IMC agrees that a complaint of defamation or falsehood is valid, it can impose a fine as well as require the offending outlet to publish a retraction and an apology. The IMC can also summon editors at its own discretion. The government frequently interferes with the work of journalists and media outlets in an attempt to control content and its increasingly aggressive intimidation of journalists has entailed both censorship and self-censorship (p.56)

The document continued that the party’s **‘goal’** was “To create an environment in which the press is free and responsible, and providing useful information to the population.” Under its **‘Strategy’** the Manifesto notes that NGC commits to: “...Take steps to repeal Part 5 of the Public Order Act and all other laws that hinder press freedom in Sierra Leone.”

Discussion

There is a general appreciation of the fact that all the three major political parties recognised issues dealing with media freedom and professionalism. The reference to the work and role of the media in their manifestoes points to that fact. However, many press freedom campaigners noted that the repeal of the criminal and seditious libel laws should have been centred stage in all the political parties’ manifestoes since all of them depended on the same media to provide platforms for them to articulate the issues in their very manifestoes.

There were divergent approaches as to how the political parties wanted to address the repeal of the criminal and seditious libel laws. Some semantics could help in arriving at the precise meaning of what the political parties meant. However, the SLPP was very direct in stating that it would “Repeal the seditious libel law” and “Adopt policies and laws to develop the capacity of journalists.” While there is no reference to ‘criminal libel’, it appears that the Manifesto

referred to both laws. The APC Manifesto neither made specific use of the words ‘seditious or criminal’ libel nor used the word ‘repeal’. It rather used the expression “Enhancing ...progressive reforms relating to journalism and freedom of expression.” This may arguably include the repeal of the criminal and seditious libel laws. The NGC used the word expression “... repeal Part 5 of the Public Order Act and all other laws that hinder press freedom in Sierra Leone”, but prefaced it with the rider “Take steps to....” This shows that their approach to repeal will not be immediate, even if it was going to happen after it would have taken certain steps.

Conclusion

While there may be some appreciation of the fact that some sorts of commitments were made by the politicians, there are apprehensions that such commitments may not be new. It is the actualisation of the commitment by the political party that would form the new government that had always been a major concern. Will 2018 be the magic year in the quest to see the repeal of criminal and seditious libel laws from the country’s law books? All eyes may be glued to the Executive arm of government which endorses policies in Cabinet Papers and those who make and repeal laws in the House of Parliament.

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THE MEDIA REFORM COORDINATING GROUP SIERRA LEONE (MRCG-SL)

The Media Reform Coordinating Group Sierra Leone (MRCG-SL) comprises key stakeholders from national media organisations, policy-making bodies and academic institution in the country. They are the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), Department of Mass Communication, Fourah Bay College (FBC, Mass Comm.), the Independent Media Commission (IMC), the Ministry of Information and Communication (MIC), Guild of Newspapers Editors (GoNE), Women in the Media Sierra Leone (WIMSAL), Independent Radio Network (IRN), Sierra Leone Reporters Union (SLRU) and Cotton Tree News(CTN). The Organization was established as an independent corporate entity with funds from the UNDP to act as the key driver of media reform agenda in Sierra Leone.

WHAT DOES THE MRCG-SL DO?

The MRCG-SL was established to coordinate the four priorities obtained from a capacity needs study of the media sector undertaken in 2013 which formed the basis of the Sierra Leone Media development strategy. The priorities are as follows:

- 1. Improved ethics of the media through regulatory or self-regulatory mechanisms.*
- 2. Promoting transparent and independent allocation of licenses, handling of complaints and stimulating an enabling regulatory and political environment for professional and pluralistic media.*
- 3. Sustainable and independent public service broadcasting serving all the people of the country.*
- 4. Strengthened professionalism and sustainability of organizations and improved people's participation in media development and content.*

VISION

A credible, economically viable and well-focused media in Sierra Leone.

MISSION

To strengthen democratic dialogue and consolidate peace and ensure development through professional, independent and sustainable media based on the right to freedom of expression.

Core Values

MRCG-SL Core values are anchored in:

- Integrity
- Fairness
- Equality
- Accountability
- Transparency
- Credibility

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