

**GOVERNANCE**

**AND THE**

---

**ELECTORAL PROCESS:**

---

**NIGERIA AND THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

**Edited By**

**OYIN OGUNBA**

# GOVERNANCE AND THE ELECTORAL PROCESS:

NIGERIA AND THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

*EDITED BY*  
**OYIN OGUNBA**

A PUBLICATION OF THE AMERICAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIA.

OLUKEMI A. ADEGBOYE

22-7-98

Published in Nigeria by  
American Studies Association of Nigeria (A.S.A.N.)  
P. O. Box 134  
University of Lagos Post Office,  
Akoka, Yaba, Lagos.

© 1997 American Studies Association of Nigeria

ISBN 978 - 017 - 372 - 2

First Published in 1997

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, adapted, or transmitted in any form or by any means: electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publishers.

*Typeset by Solo Ventures  
141 Ikorodu Road, Lagos.*

*Printed in Nigeria by  
University of Lagos Press  
Commercial Avenue  
University of Lagos Campus  
Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria.*

# INFORMATION SERVICES: THE WHEELS OF THE AMERICAN ELECTORAL PROCESS: IMPLICATIONS FOR NIGERIA

*Oluwakemi A. Adegboye*  
*Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.*

## Introduction

America has succeeded in evolving a political system that is both enviable and significant in world politics in the last two centuries. The system of governance and the electoral processes have been institutionalized. Peace and serenity characterise the electoral scene in America and this calls for a salient question. What is the trick?:

The flow of information is not a luxury. It is a life and death necessity; life and death for industries, for communities, for nations economic health, for survival, for deterrence of war, for progress, for posterity. This is not an exaggeration, it is a hard fact.<sup>1</sup>

There is no doubt that in any process of enlightenment, political in particular, information services provided in a nation are of immense importance. America has succeeded in operating a system of governance with a lesser degree of confusion that obtains in many other nations. So far, America has held a total of forty-two elections since the declaration of independence in 1776.<sup>2</sup> Even though there are many elements that have contributed to the success and progress of their political culture, the nation's body politics has in its wheels a dynamic information system.

This paper seeks to take an overview of the American system of government and discuss the role of information services in the electoral processes. It also discusses implications for Nigeria.



## **Democratic Government: The American Choice**

Without attempting to delve into the details of the American political system, it suffices to state that a kind of 'political culture' has been integrated into the web of the society and has been transferred from generation to generation.

The term 'Democratic Government' has become almost synonymous with the American governance and the electoral processes and this is better depicted by the account rendered by Burns and Peltason on the day after the senatorial elections in America:

All is calm. The factories are open, people at work, stores crowded, students in their classrooms. On the main street there are no barricades, no angry mobs, no protesting parades. The people of a large country after months of vigorous campaigning and bitter argument, have chosen the men who are to run their schools systems, direct their cities, legislate in their State Capitol and guide their nation in Washington. These decisions will closely affect their lives and their fortunes. Yet they were made without blood shed.<sup>3</sup>

The whole affair of free and fair electoral processes started with the 1787 Constitutional Conference held in Philadelphia which announced the constitution.<sup>4</sup> It is a constitution that has taken into consideration the heterogeneous nature of the American society hence the justification of 'Federalism'.

The U.S. system of government is a pluralistic one that believes that there must be more than a single centre of sovereign power in order to tame power, encourage participation and ensure that conflicts are resolved to the benefit of all parties involved.<sup>5</sup> At present, the country is made up of fifty State Governments.<sup>6</sup>

The issue of liberal democracy is a highly valued legacy. The

## *The Creative Arts, The Mass Media and The Electoral Process*

testimonies of American writers affirm that:

We tend to take democratic government for granted, even worse, we seem to consider it inevitable. We take pride in our ability to make democracy work. But we must remember that we have inherited a going system - a system established by others not by ourselves. Our job is to keep it going, and to keep it going, we must understand it.<sup>7</sup>

From the above opinion, it is obvious that the continuity of the system inherited has to be enhanced by knowledge. The holy scripture asserted that "A wise man is strong, and a man of knowledge increases power".<sup>8</sup> Knowledge therefore means power. American writers further opined that:

- (a) Knowledge is not only power, but it is the key to freedom and thus to the maintenance of democratic society.<sup>9</sup>
- (b) ... Power grounded in knowledge and framed by respect for human dignity, is the necessary tool for the development of a democratic system.<sup>10</sup>
- (c) The democratic system moreover places the greatest demands on the use of the reason and the development of adequate knowledge by which means alone the largest number may not only remain free but increase their own personal freedom.<sup>11</sup>
- (d) In our democracy, we have pledged ourselves to a noble conception of man. He is offered the right through voting to govern all matters that affect him... His channels of power begin with the freedom of speech... They are extended through equal opportunity to information...<sup>12</sup>.

The role of information services in the sustenance of the U.S. electoral system has been clearly shown above. The individuals in the society

has a role to play in the electoral process and should be well informed to fulfil this role. They should have access to facts and contribute to political thoughts and activities. The votes of the electorate cast in the proper manner is equally an absolute concern of the society. The American society is a highly literate one and is always ready to provide the required information flow. For instance, literature has revealed that "American democracy has experimented with training of school children and adults in political and social thinking as a means of achieving a highly diversified and often romantic cult of nationality".<sup>13</sup>

### **The U.S. Information Services**

The contribution of the various information services in the U.S. are of great importance. Such services come from libraries with the Library of Congress as the Chief; the National Archives; electronic media, print media; other multimedia communication systems. Information bodies and organizations are agents of posterity and they facilitate the building of a nation and the making of dynamic history. Citizens are aware of their existence and they make use of such facilities to enhance their participation in the electoral processes.

### ***Library Services***

The library in any nation serves as the custodian of the socio-cultural heritage of the society. It is the citadel and repository of knowledge as well as an agent of information transfer. "In civilized countries, national cultures emerged out of the thoughts and writings of individuals disseminated through lectures and written words"<sup>14</sup> and this assertion would go a long way in assessing the role of library services in the development of the U.S. electoral process.



## *The Creative Arts, The Mass Media and The Electoral Process*

The American society is a highly literate one. Statistics on the U.S. communication media revealed that in 1990 alone, books published in America totalled up to 46,738<sup>15</sup>. The publication excludes Government publications and non-commercial books.<sup>16</sup>

The Library of Congress was established in Washington D.C. in 1800.<sup>17</sup> The Library which is accounted as the world's largest library served at creation as the U.S. National Library as well as the Library of the nations legislature.<sup>18</sup> The Library is very vast in various subject area especially in the areas related to the governance of the country right from inception. The Anglo-American war of August 1814 destroyed the first set of collections in the library. This was however replenished by the donation of President Jefferson's 6,000 collections of which he latter commented:

I do not know that it contains any branch of science which the congress would wish to exclude from their collection; there is, in fact, no subjects to which a Member of Congress may not have occasion to refer.<sup>19</sup>

The Library was designed originally to house about 3 million volumes in 1897. It has since exceeded the number and extensions work had been carried out on it.<sup>20</sup>

The Library employs automation both in research and services and also has access to various outside data banks.<sup>21</sup> It is also known all over the world for the design of the Library of Congress Classification Scheme - a scheme used by various libraries particularly academic libraries in classifying their library materials. The National Union Catalogue is also published by the library of congress. This is a Cumulative Author list representing Library of Congress printed cards and titles reported by other American libraries. The catalog is used all over the world. There is no doubt that the Library of Congress has in its holdings rich information materials to promote the U.S. electoral process.



### *U.S. Archival Services*

Generally, National Archives serve as the administrative unit responsible for the national documentary heritage of a nation.

The National Archives of the U.S. serve as the repository for the records of the Congress and the Supreme Court. Records available in the archives date back to the Declaration of Independence while the oldest document available there is dated 1672. Older records are however available in the state archives, historical societies, universities and other libraries.

The National Archives has direct responsibility for the records of the Federal government agencies while papers of some bodies and individuals are provided Courtesy Storage. Some records of political figures and high ranking officials are also kept in the Presidential Libraries which form part of the National Archives.

On the issue of access, all records that are one or two years old are fully accessible to users except on specific restricted court decision, statute or presidential executive order. The National Archives make accessibility to records easy for users with the provision of over 4,000 finding aids.

Services are of good quality with the use of automation in administrative and intellectual control. Records are created in computerised forms, microfiches and microfilms. Access to the records could also be got through ARLIN, the national bibliographic system organized by the National Association of Research Libraries.

As at 1994, plans were already set for the second building of the U.S. National Archives covering an area of 1,700,000 square feet. The Records of the country between 1672 - 1988 is given in meters as 1,684,200 feet cube.

## **The Press<sup>23</sup>**

The press consisting mainly of the Newspapers and Magazines is a form of the media that have a significant impact of the American electoral processes. The press in the U.S. generate a wealth of information that keep the society informed through and through.

Statistics revealed that newspapers are published in 1,513 U.S. cities and every small town has its own journal. In 1990, 1,611 daily newspapers were published and newspaper circulation was 62,328,000. In 1992, more than 115 million people representing 62.6% of the adult population read a daily newspaper.

Information gathered also revealed that most papers give interest to local and regional affairs. Also the issue of decentralization of government activities was responsible for the lack of National newspapers. One inference could however be drawn from this, the very lack of national newspapers could be interpreted that newspaper reports are fair and dependable. This is an evidence that biases are reduced to the bearest minimum as there are no newspapers specifically devoted to government opinion.

One commendable information about the U.S. Press is their merger of about twenty newspapers in 1992. The merger was necessitated by economic strain on the press. Even though economic gain was essential, the information consciousness inherent in the society made the merger work by publishing 519 daily newspaper accounting for almost 60% of the U.S. daily newspapers in 1992.

## **Radio and Television Services<sup>24</sup>**

The radio and television are very potent and dynamic instruments for shaping and monitoring the electoral process of a nation. Their

greatest advantage lies in their wide coverage. If their use is positively exploited, they serve the purpose of building on the socio-cultural and political heritage of the society.

In the year 1986, there were 3,969 licensed F.M. radio stations; 1,272 licensed educational F.M. radio stations; 4,887 licensed A.M. stations and almost 50 radio network programmes in the United States of America. In 1990, there were an estimated 529 million radio receivers in use.

For television, there were about 203 million receivers in use in the year 1990. In 1991 commercial television stations totalled 1,594 in number. Also, it was estimated that 92.1 million households was having one or more television receivers while 56.2 million households were receiving commercial cable TV.

In all, both the radio and the television services were operated commercially and non commercially.

### **Role of Associations<sup>25</sup>**

The American society has a significant number of Associations. These Associations are either learned societies, labour unions or socio-economic unions.

As earlier mentioned in this paper, the American society encourages participation and freedom of speech. Hence, each Association has a role to play in the American body - politics.

One of the ways conflicts are resolved in the society is by these small associations to take care of matters pertaining to the groups involved. While the government is relieved of this problem, it has time to look into affairs that are of general interests.

## *The Creative Arts, The Mass Media and The Electoral Process*

Each association has an input in the governance of the nation as they press hard for their views to be respected and their needs to be met.

Furthermore, most of the learned societies in America generate a vast number of records and consequently have their own data banks: Statistics have been able to throw some light on the American Learned Association. In the area of Bibliography and Library Science alone, about twenty-one learned associations were listed.

These include among others:

- American Library Association
- American Society for Information Science
- Society of American Archivists
- Bibliographical Society of America

In the area of Law and Political Science, about twenty-one Associations were also listed. They include among others:

- Academy of Political Science
- Arbitration Association
- American Society for Political & Legal Philosophy
- American Society for Public Administration
- American Peace Society
- American Judicature etc.

In the area related to American history, about twenty-six were listed. These also include:

- American Antiquarian Society
- American Association of State & Local History
- American Historical Association
- American 18<sup>th</sup> Century Studies etc.



The contributions of the various Association in America no doubt have a great deal of impact on the governance and electoral process of the nation.

## **U.S. Information and Communication Policies**

The U.S. Government plays a significant role in lubricating the wheels of the electoral processes. The nation's laws are such that stress fairness to the generality of the citizens and seek that the people should know their rights.

First, the Freedom of Information Act "provides for the disclosure of information held by the administrative agencies to the public, unless the documents requested fall into one of the specific exemptions"<sup>26</sup> The act provides information on where and how certain categories of information could be found.

Secondly, there is the issue of freedom of speech which is also worthy of note. It is said that the "government is forbidden to protect the speech it likes and punish the speech it does not and that a statute that protected Democratic speech and prohibited Republican speech would be unconstitutional".<sup>27</sup> The issue of freedom of speech is further buttressed by Twain who opined that:

It is by the goodness of God that in our country we have those three unspeakable precious thing; freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, and the providence never to practice either of them.<sup>28</sup>

The society is known for the ability to differentiate between speech and the substance of speech. Speeches are not necessarily right, but people are not deprived to air their opinion.

The American law also accommodates a number of provisions tagged the 'fairness doctrines'. These doctrines include among others:-

## *The Creative Arts, The Mass Media and The Electoral Process*

- (a) That broadcasters licensed by the Federal Government should provide reasonable and fair coverage of opposing viewpoints on controversial issues of public importance.
- (b) Fair comment doctrine which is intended to give opportunities for free discussion by the news media on issue which affect the interest of the community.

Others include the fair hearing doctrine, the fair credit reporting and so on.<sup>29</sup>

Also worthy of note is the 'political editorializing rule' which requires a licensed news agency to offer "a candidate for public office a reasonable opportunity to respond whenever the license has endorsed the candidate's opponent or opposed the candidate in an editorial".<sup>30</sup>

The U.S. services in the area of automation and global information flow is also commendable. The transmission of satellite television programmes all over the world is worthy of note on this area.<sup>31</sup>

Finally the United States Government also exhibits a sense of value for information by extending its information services outside the country. Such services are those offered by the United States Information Services (USIS) established in Nigeria.

### **The American Experience: Implication for Nigeria**

Much has been said so far, about the liberal democracy being practised in America and how the Information services available in the nation have served as a catalyst in perturating the political culture.

The United States has gone a long way in dictating the tune of liberal democracy in world politics. In fact, she could be said in this sense

to have the copyright of 'Federalism'. However, a lot of nations have been attempting to dance to the tune struck by America without understanding the 'notes' of the music.

The big question that arises at this juncture is that: has the American experience any lessons to teach the Nigerian Political scene.

For almost four decades now Nigeria has been battling to establish a kind of Government that could be called 'her own'. However for some inexplicable reasons, the victory seems to be always slipping through her fingers. At present, there is a loud agitation going on for 'home-grown' democracy. For a long time now the Nigerian society has desired the kind of results America had always obtained but the questions that arise here again are: Has Nigeria really fashioned her own system? Do we now have standardized ideology to project and transfer to the future generation? Answers have to be found to these questions first.

Literature revealed that:

Americans came very quickly to agree on the virtues of their constitutional system. ... with an unbelievable short time, hardly more than a decade, American's no longer debated seriously whether their constitutional system was good or bad...<sup>32</sup>

Nigeria should always have behind their mind that the American system is only pluralistic while ours is an essentially plural society. All efforts should therefore be made to make our own system work for us. At present, copies of the report of the constitutional conference still need to be given a wider circulation in order to welcome comment from the people.

On the other hand, efforts should be made to improve on information services on the Nigerian society. The existing information should be well gathered and harnessed to enhance governance and electoral



processes in the nation. New grounds also need to be exploited to make this goal realisable.

On the educational scene, concerted efforts should be made to wipe illiteracy totally off the society. More money need to be pumped into our country's citadel of learning to enhance scholarship. Our University Libraries need to be financially supported not to talk of the public and special information services in the nation. For instance, the Hezekiah Oluwasanmi Library, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife in the pre-1986 years did subscribe to 5,000 journals titles and 12,000 volumes of books annually. However, at present, the library barely subscribes to 800 journal titles as against the 4,500 International Standard for medium libraries while it acquires about 2,000 volumes of books as against the 10,000 number International Standard.<sup>33</sup>

On the issue of Archival services, records management culture needs to be inculcated into the Nigerian individual and public agencies in general.. The National Archives need to be well funded while the Federal and State agencies should fully utilize the services of this institution as their repository.

Again, a perusal of the Nigeria National Mass Communication Policy adopted in 1990<sup>34</sup>, revealed good purpose and intensions. However, efforts still need to be made to make the Nigeria mass media thorough agents of socio, economic and political enlightenment. Issues relating to press freedom and censorship need to be reviewed in the society. Our media men however need to keep their own side of the bargain healthy by trying to place a high value of objectivity on news reporting and information transfer.

One segment of the Nigerian populace neglected as far as information dissemination is concerned is the rural populace. Even though the Mass Communication policy caters for them, practically, they are still under-informed. There is still a high degree of illiteracy in our rural



areas. These category of people still need to be educated on Nigerian citizenship, voting rights and human rights. Though this category of people have been catered for through such programmes as MAMSER, Better Life Programmes, Family Support Programme, and so on, there is still need for information dissemination centres to be set up in this area. The motion of Aboyade for Integrated Rural Information System (Rudis) could be of good benefit in this vein.<sup>35</sup>

Furthermore, Nigeria needs to borrow a leaf from America in the areas of communication technology. The issue of automation and computerization are now fashionable worldwide. The issue of global information via the satellite should also be looked into. The 'Farm house dialogue' suggested that Third World countries which lack facilities to disseminate information to the rest of the world should pull their resources together to allay the issue of 'satellite tyranny' from the developed countries.<sup>36</sup>

Also, the Nigerian society should place participation above the issue of power and the people should be so enlightened.

Finally, the need for Nigeria to build an information conscious culture could not be over emphasized. The country needs it so much at this stage of development and the big question now is Nigeria which way forward?

## **Conclusion**

This paper has not attempted to paint the American governance and electoral processes as faultless. It has however acknowledged the fact that the society is one that knows what it wants and how to use the best alternatives in achieving desired goals.

*The Creative Arts, The Mass Media and The Electoral Process*

To the American people, governance means liberal democracy and to have this, Information flow has a pride of place. It is the 'heart' pumping the other elements of democracy to desirable destinations of peaceful governance and electoral processes. The above point of view is better summed up in the words of John E. Moss:

A democracy without free and truthful flow of information from government to its people is nothing more than an elected dictatorship.<sup>37</sup>

## REFERENCES

1. Harris Charles Jr. Record Management Journal 6 (4) 1968. p. 2.
2. The New Encyclopedia Boatannica. Vol. 29, Chicago: Encyclopedia Boatannica Inc., 1993. p. 212.
3. Burns James MacGregor and Peltason Jack Walter (ed.) Government by the people: the dynamics of American National State and Local Government. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall Inc., 1963, p.3.
4. Ibid, p. 33.
5. Dahl Robert A., Pluralist Democracy in the United States: Conflict and Consent. Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1967, pp. 22-24.
6. The Europa World Year Book 1993, Vol. II London: Europe Publications Ltd.; 1993. p. 3065.
7. Burns James MacGregor and Peltason JackWalter op. cit., p. 4.
8. Prov. 24:5. New American Standard Bible. (The open bible edition) Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Publishers, 1979, p. 602.
9. D'antonio W.V. and Ehrlich H.J. "Democracy in America: retrospect and prospect" in Power and Democracy in America. Drucker Peter F., Miller Delbert C. & Dahl Roberts A. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press Publishers; 1961 reprinted 1980. p. 151.

*The Creative Arts, The Mass Media and The Electoral Process*

10. Ibid. p. 152.
11. Ibid. p. 145.
12. Delbert C. Miller, "Democracy and decision making in the community power structure".  
Power and Democracy in America. Drucker Peter F., Miller Delbert C. & Dahl Robert A. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1961. Reprinted 1980, p. 26.
13. Nwaji L. Odo, The Library in Nigeria. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co., Ltd., 1986, p. 60.
14. Ibid. p. 64.
15. The Europa World Year Book, 1993 Vol. II. London: Europa Publications Ltd. 1993, p. 3055.
16. Ibid.
17. Olanlokun S. O. and Salisu T.M.; Understanding the Library: a handbook on library use. Lagos: Concept Publications Ltd., 1985, p. 8.
18. Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science, Vol. 15, edited by Allen Kent et. al. New York: Mareel Dekker, Inc., 1975, p. 19.
19. Ibid. p. 19.
20. Olanlokun S. O. and Salisu T.M. op. cit. p. 9.



21. Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science ... op. cit. p. 46.
22. All Information & Statistics on the U.S. National Archives were obtained from the same source: "Les archives nationales ou federales systems problems et perspectives.  
  
The national or federal archives; systems problems and perspectives. Proceedings of the Twenty - Sixth International Conference of Roundtable on Archives. Madrid, 1989. Roma: International Council on Archives, 1991. pp. 187-252.
23. All statistics on the U.S. press were obtained from the same source: Europa World Year Book 1993, Vol. II: London: Europe Publications Ltd., 1993. pp. 3055 - 3079.
24. All statistics on the U.S. Radio and Television Services were obtained from The Europa World Year Book 1993, Vol. II. London: Europe Publications Ltd., 1993. pp. 3085 - 3086.
25. Information on list of Learned Associations were obtained from: The World of Learning 1993. 43<sup>rd</sup> ed. London: Europe Publications Ltd., 1993.
26. The Guide to American Law: Everyone's legal encyclopedia Vol. 5, St. Paul: West Publishing Company, 1984, p. 303.
27. Ibid. p. 30.
28. Ibid. p. 304.
29. Ibid. pp. 134 - 139.
30. Ibid. p. 138.

31. Obasanjo Olusegun and Mabogunje Akin, eds. Elements of democracy, Abeokuta: ALF Publications, 1992, p. 153.
32. Dahl Robert A. op. cit. pp. 72 - 73.
33. Information on book and journal acquisition was obtained from the orders section of the Hezekiah Oluwasanmi Library, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.
34. Federal Republic of Nigeria. National Mass Communication Policy (Adopted with amendments by the National Council of Ministers (January 20-21, 1988), the National Council of States, (March 17, 1990) and the Armed Forces Ruling Council (April 10, 1990).
35. Aboyade B. Olabimpe. The Provision of Information for rural development, Ibadan: Fountain Publications, 1987, pp. 89 - 100.
36. Obasanjo Olusegun and Mabogune Akin eds. op. cit. p. 153.
37. The Guide to American Law: Everyone's encyclopedia op. cit. p. 303.