

MEDIA AND THE FEATURES OF DEMOCRACY IN NIGER REPUBLIC

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Résumé

Cet article traite de l'apport des médias au rayonnement de la démocratie au Niger. Malgré, le nombre important des organes de presse, le Niger fait toujours face à plusieurs défis démocratiques. L'objectif de cette recherche est de faire une analyse du paysage médiatique nigérien afin de dégager la contribution de ce dernier à la pérennisation des acquis démocratiques. A travers une analyse des dispositifs institutionnels et juridiques de la communication au Niger, nous avons découvert que les médias jouissent d'un cadre juridique et institutionnel favorable à leur fonctionnement. Cette situation leur permet ainsi de contribuer significativement au renforcement du cadre et surtout à la culture des valeurs démocratiques.

Mots-clés : *média, démocratie, communication, Niger*

Abstract

This paper is on the bilateral relationship between the key features of democracy and mass media in Niger Republic. The aim of the paper is to analyze the ways mass media enhance a democratic life in the country. The study critically analyses how Nigerien media system reflects the political structure of the country. The work, based on a literature review, draws its theoretical underpinnings from The four theories of the press and its derived support the analysis. Through a review of some literatures, the analysis reveals research discovered that media contribute significantly to the attainment and sustainment of democracy in Niger.

Key words: *media, democracy, communication, Niger*

Introduction

Communication as process of sharing messages, opinions, and ideas is fundamental in human life. It contributes in uplifting the socio-political and economic system in a given context. Communication can create and promote democratic features in the society. In other words, there may be a strong link between media and democracy. This paper is an attempt in analyzing the role of media in advancing democracy in Niger

Republic. The study focuses on how media contribute in the attainment of democratic life in Nigerien context. The paper will provide a brief history of the Nigerien political and media systems before analyzing. It will analyze the constitutional framework of media operation in the country. The work is interested in exploring the contribution of the mass media in the electoral process.

1. Background of the study

Mass communication research is a very recent field of study in Niger Republic. In fact, the University of Zinder (UZ) is the only public university offering mass communication as a course. The public and private Higer Schools are interested in professional communication studies. For instance, the *Institut de Formation aux Techniques de l'Information et de la Communication (IFTIC)* offers only professional certificates. According to the Niger Republic educational system, only universities have the credit of offering research studies. On the other hand, polytechnics offer professional studies. This is perhaps why only few studies have been conducted on the area of mass communication in Niger compared to other countries like Nigeria for instance. It is noteworthy that some of the previous studies succeeded in exploring the link between media and society in Niger. Those studies are that of Gambo (2008), Alou (2011) on media and food crisis, Alzouma (2015) on the problematic of social media usage, Gambo (2017) radio and health communication, and Haman (2018) on Linguistic analysis of radio broadcasting.

Researchers like Maignan (2000), Issa (1996) analyzed the socio-political context of the mass media in Niger Republic. Despite those studies, the bilateral relationship between media and society is not well explored. So, this study attempts in reducing the wide gap in the area of communication research in Niger. This is why the study is of utmost importance. This paper will contribute in enriching the area of mass media research in Francophone countries.

1. Brief Note on Niger Republic

1.1. *The socio-demographic presentation*

Niger Republic is located in West Africa. It shares borders from the south with Nigeria and Benin, from the north with Algeria and Libya. From the west, the country is limited by Burkina Faso and Mali. Niger shares its eastern border with Chad. Niger Republic is extended on a surface of 1, 267, 000 km². It is one of the few African countries with a large surface. In 2020, Niger population is about 24,118,328. (Populationdata.net). According to the *Institut National des Statistiques* INS (National Institute of Statistics), Niger Republic population is made of about twenty five (25) ethnic groups. The main groups are Hausa (47, 2%), zarma (18,2%) and Fulani (8,3%). The ethnic minorities in Niger include Songai, Tuaregs, Kanuri, Tubu, Dagaza, Yoruba, Bambara, Mossi, Dendi. According to INS the population of Niger is predominantly Muslims (98, 6%).

Niger is made of eight (8) geographical regions or states. These are Agadez, Diffa, Dosso, Maradi, Tahoua, Tillabery, Zinder and the capital Niamey. Regions are subdivided into sixty three (63) departements or districts. The districts are made of two sixty five (265) communes or local governments.

2. Theoretical framework of the study

This paper is an attempt in analyzing the contribution of the media in the attainment of democratic life in Nigerien context. Therefore, the four *theories of the press* and the development communication approach can support this analysis. According to Siebert et al (1956) cited in Christians, G. C. et al (2009) the four theories of the press determine how the press function within a particular social and political structure. In other words, the press takes different forms and serves different purposes in different political and social system. It is believed that a free and responsible press is vital for democracy. For instance, in the Commission's report on *A Free and Responsible Press* (1947), communication scholars argued that "democracy depended on a flow of trustworthy information and a diversity of relevant opinions". (Christians, G. C. et al 2009:). The four

theories of the press support the idea of a free press with a social responsibility that can facilitate a democratic communication.

Being one of the theories emerged from the four models of the press; democratic participant theory perceives information not only as a simple right but as a social need. For this theory, democratic life which is synonymous to development can be achieved through a democratic and active participation of all members of the society. Indeed, this brought the need for media pluralism and diverse media content. The features of democracy can be promoted through media pluralism and diversity. This is why in many countries; new media policies were introduced in order to guarantee the freedom of press. These theories of the press facilitate a better understanding of our analysis on the relationship between media and democracy in Niger Republic.

The social responsibility theory is also part the theoretical framework of this study. For media to contribute in the positive democratic life there shouldn't be complete freedom of the press but a freedom with responsibility. As clearly stated clearly by Asemah et al (2017), social responsibility emphasizes more on the accountability of the media organization. In other words, for media to become the fourth estate of the realm, it should serve the public interest with maximum obligation. This can be done through self-regulation or government intervention. So, this theoretical framework will significantly contribute in analyzing the role of Nigerien Press in the attainment of democratic values in the country.

3. Research Methodology of the research

This study is based on a qualitative research method. The collected data has been objectively and qualitatively analysed For this study, the research adopts a qualitative research method. The study adopts the qualitative content analysis as the technique of data collection. Through researcher analyses the legal framework of media organization in Niger Republic. The sample of the study is made of the decree of 30th March 1993, the decree of 20th December 1999, the 2010 constitution, and November 2011 declaration of table of Mountain. These are part of the fundamental documents on the legal framework of media organization in Niger Republic. The unit of analysis concerns the mains points of

each document on media pluralism, media freedom and media regulating body.

4. Research findings and analysis

4.1. Emergence of multiparty

After 1991, the country witnessed a multi-party political system. This gave birth to many political parties. According to the *Commission Electorale Nationale Indépendante (CENI)*, Niger's Independent National Electoral Commission, a total of one hundred and sixty-three (163) political parties registered for the 2020 general election in Niger. The leading parties are *PNDS-Tarayya (Parti Nigérien pour la Démocratie et le Socialisme – Nigerien Party for Democracy and Socialism-Tarayya)*; *the MNSD-Nassara (Mouvement National pour la Société de Développement – National Movement for a Development Society)*; *MPR-Jamburiya (Mouvement Patriotique pour la République- Patriotic Movement for the Republic)* and the *MODEN FA-Lumana (Mouvement Démocratique Nigérien pour une Fédération Africaine – Nigerien Democratic Movement for an African Federation)*. Others are *RDR-Tchanji (Renouveau Democratique Republicain- Renewed Democratic Republican)*, *CPR-Inganci Congrès Pour la République- Congress for the Republic.*). The multi-party system reflects the democratic process of government in the country. This political multi-party is synonymous to freedom of expression which constitutes an important step to the freedom of the press. It is important to note that freedom of expression and that of the press constitutes the back bone of any democratic system. The democratic state provides a lucid media framework. In other words, the media legal framework in Niger should reflect its political multi-party and ensures media diversity and the freedom of expression and that of the press.

4.2. Media legal framework in Niger

The 1992 Niger's constitution is the first legal document which guaranteed the freedom of the press in the country. Then other legal governing bodies followed. These are the decree of 30th March 1993 and that 20th December, 1999 on the Press Freedom Regime. Others include decree of 20th December, 1999 and the 2010 constitution. This

current constitution guarantees the freedom of the press under sections 30,157 and 158.

In order to enhance this freedom, the section 156 of the 2010 constitution provides the creation of the *Conseil Supérieur de la Communication* CSC- Supreme communication council. CSC stands as a regulatory body in charge of ensuring and guaranteeing the freedom of the press. As stated under the section 157 of the 2010 constitution *Le Conseil a pour mission d'assurer et de garantir la liberté et l'indépendance des moyens de communication audiovisuelle, de la presse écrite et électronique dans le respect de la loi-* CSC has the mission to guarantee the independence and freedom of the press both broadcast and print media within the abundance of the law. According to the *CSC*, the press is free. It is free in facilitating a democratic debate, promoting human rights and socio-cultural products. The media should be free from bias. It should contribute in attaining peace and unity in the society.

In Niger, the Freedom of the press is also strengthened by an initiative called *Table de la Montagne* –Table of Mountain. This *Table de la Montagne* was initiated by the former President of Niger, Mahamadou Issoufou in November 2011. is an initiative intended to banish the imprisonment of journalist in Niger Republic. In November 2011, the then Niger Republic President, Mahamadou Issoufou, signed the declaration. According to this declaration no journalist will be jailed because of defamation, slander or any other journalistic offence. This initiative is regarded as a good advancement in improving the quality of press freedom atmosphere in Niger. Other existing safeguarding bodies of freedom of the press include *Observatoire Nigérien Indépendant des Médias pour l'Éthique et la Déontologie (ONIMED)* -Nigerien Independent Observatory for Media Ethic and Deontology and Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA). These independent self-regulatory bodies contribute in sustaining the freedom of the press within Nigerien political and socio-economic context. ONIMED for instance ensures that journalists respect media ethic and deontology. In case of violating the code of conduct, ONMED punishes the deviant media organizations. On the other hand, it also carries out pleading activities for the promotion of the freedom of the press and equal access to information. These professional self-regulatory bodies reflect clearly the main idea behind the social responsibility theory of the media. As

mentioned earlier in the theoretical framework of our study, for the media to serve the public interest, it should operate with a maximum degree of responsibility. This implies that the press is free but it should act responsibly. This finding revealed that the Nigerien media legal framework reflect the normative model of the press. So, it can be said that the Nigerien media framework is favorable to freedom of the press which This can significantly contribute to the promotion of democracy and other social values.

4.3. An analysis of media landscape in Niger Republic

From 1960 to 1990, the State has the monopoly of media system. In that this period there is no political multiparty. Also the media system remains fully under state control. No private media was yet allowed. The only then newspaper, le *Sabel* and the Office de Radiodiffusion et de Télévision du Niger (ORTN) remained state owned media organizations. ORTN comprises a television station the *Tele Sabel* and radio station la *Voix du Sabel*. The media practitioners of these stations are considered as public servant workers. It implies that their mission is to serve the purpose of the state.

The 1993 law on privatization of the media organization contributed to media pluralism in Niger. The law permitted the establishment of many private media both print and broadcasting. In 2020, the supreme communication council (*Conseil Supérieur de la Communication* CSC) provided a full description of media pluralism in Niger. According to CSC, Niger counts thirty-four (34) newspapers private and government owned. For instance we have *Haske, le Républicain, la roue de l'histoire, le canard déchaîné, la Griffes, L'Opinion, La Hache, La Liberté, Le démocrate* among others.

Privates radios stations were established in Niger Republic since late 1993. In 2020, the country has sixty-seven (67) private radios stations. Some of these radios are *Radio et Musique (RM), Anfani, Souda, Tenere FM, Tambara, Sarounia, Bonférey, Fara'a, Nomade, Hadin Kay and Garkoua* . On the other hand, sixteen (16) television stations are privately owned while the state has two (*tele Sabel and Tal TV*). Some of the TV stations include *Dounia TV, RRT, Bonférey, Niger 24, Labari, Tambara, Anfani, Canal 3 Niger Gaskia TV*. Niger has a total of sixteen (16) online Medias organizations such as Air info, actuniger, Niger

inter, Niameyinfo, mediacultureinfo etc. The establishment of community radios gives media pluralism its full sense. *Radio Gomni* is the first community radio. It was established in 1999 followed by radio *Tchintabaraden* in 2000. According to the CSC, in 2017, Niger Republic counted one hundred and seventy-nine (179) community radio stations. These figures explain the democratization of media in Niger republic. Media pluralism stands for a roadmap for a perennial democratic life in Niger. Media pluralism implies a diversity of ideas and opinions on matters of public interest. Guaranteeing media diversity is an important step toward sustaining the features of democracy. When opinions and ideas are aired freely using diverse media houses, there is a great hope in conducting an unanimous electoral process.

4.4. Media and election in Niger

4.4.1. Voter's education

Free and fair election is one of the features of democracy. It is believed that freedom of expression and of the press is essential for a fair and credible election. According to the CSC, during an electioneering year, media become more important tools in promoting democracy. It is noteworthy that in an election process a free press plays key roles. The press informs and educates the public on electoral topic. Through political debates, media succeed in enhancing a better understanding between political candidates and their followers. The press also assesses the incumbent government's policies. This can influence voters' decisions. In Niger Republic, election periods are full of political propaganda messages. Private and government owned media play important role in enlightening the public for a peaceful election. Politicians recognize the power of the media in promoting political ideologies. This leads sometimes to media abuse in the country during election. So, in order to reduce the abuse of the mass media by politicians, the CSC establishes some guidelines for fair media access during election in Niger. This is a form of government intervention in order to regulate media performance as championed by the social responsibility theory of the press.

4.4.2. Media access during political campaigns

During political campaigns, CSC ensures equal and effective access for all political parties, associations and citizens to the public and private media. Through different decisions on 6th of October 2020, CSC determined the condition of access and production of media content for the December and February 2020 general election in Niger. This is very crucial because the country witnessed its first ever democratic transition in its history in April 2021.

Indeed, the CSC as the media regulatory body monitors media coverage of political activities such as meeting, declarations and rallies. It defines the conditions of media use during election period. These conditions are:

1. Three to five minutes Five (5) to three (3) minutes of broadcast on *Tele Sabel* and *voix du Sabel* and a quarter (1/4) page of *Sabel dimanche* newspaper are dedicated for political messages to every political party or independent candidate depending on its or his national representation. The candidate or the party explains freely his or its political programs to the audiences.
2. The parties have the right to the studio of the public broadcasting stations for 65 mn minutes for recording and editing their 3-5 minutes 5-3 mn programs.
3. The messages are diffused after the 1pm radio and 8h30 pm television national network news. The messages are randomly selected.

The role of mass media isn't limited to the periods before and during election. Media contribute significantly in easing post-election campaign. The *voix du Sabel* aired the election result of each polling unit. Then the final and global result is broadcast live by the ORTN (*Voix du Sabel* and *Tele Sabel*). In order to educate and persuade the public for a peaceful social cohesion during the Nigerien 2020 general election, the media aired frequently a song titled *Zabe ba fada ba* (election isn't fight). The song is sung by a coalition of Nigerien artists. It preaches peace and unity for a better social cohesion. Even though, the post electoral period was characterized by some riots, the media have contributed in creating and maintaining a social post-electoral consensus.

Conclusion

In Niger, as in many countries in of the world, there is an important link between media and democracy. In fact, the media system reflects the different political era in the country. From 1960 to 1990, Niger passed through a single party and so also the media remained state owned. However, we the need for a democratic political system from 1992, media pluralism was found necessary. This So, the media pluralism has contributed to in the attainment of democratic life in Niger. The media enhanced the democratic process through political participation During election, the media play significant role by creating and sustaining social consensus. Being one of the least developed countries, Niger republic, in collaboration with development agencies, adopted a participatory approach of development communication through community radios initiatives. The aim of the approach is to facilitate the participation of all social groups and communities for in the attainment of democracy and development process.

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