



CENSORSHIP AND SECURITY: IMPACT OF MEDIA LAWS AND GOVERNMENT ACTIONS ON JOURNALISTS' SAFETY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Press freedom in Nigeria is facing growing challenges, driven by restrictive media laws, increased government surveillance, and tightening censorship practices. This study explores how these legal and political conditions affect journalists' safety and limit their ability to work freely. Drawing on survey responses from 21 journalists working in print, broadcast and online media, combined with case studies and policy reviews, the research outlines how censorship is often carried out under the pretext of national security or guiding public interest. Laws such as the Cybercrime Act of 2015, the Nigerian Press Council Act and the National Broadcasting Code are frequently mentioned as tools used to intimidate, detain, or silence journalists, particularly those reporting on sensitive topics like corruption, elections or conflict. Beyond direct government action, the study uncovers how economic pressure and media ownership influence editorial choices. Journalists, whether working in government-

owned or privately owned outlets, often face subtle but persistent pressure to support political narratives. One of the most consistent findings is the high level of self-censorship among media

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professionals, driven by concerns about job loss, legal action or personal safety. Even digital platforms, once considered spaces for free speech, are now being restricted through content takedowns, surveillance and platform bans. The analysis draws on Libertarian, Social Responsibility and Chilling Effect theories to explore the tension between press freedom and state control. These frameworks help explain how fear, regulation and power structures shape journalistic behaviour in

complex ways. The study concludes by calling for urgent reforms to protect press freedom in Nigeria, support journalist safety and ensure that media practitioners can operate without fear. It also stresses the need for civil society, global institutions and media allies to actively resist ongoing efforts to suppress free expression.

Introduction

The media plays a critical role in democratic societies by promoting transparency, accountability, and the dissemination of information. However, in Nigeria, press freedom is under increasing threat due to censorship, restrictive laws, and direct attacks on journalists (Dare, 2020). Investigative journalists and media organisations frequently face harassment, arrests, intimidation, and even violence when reporting on corruption, human rights abuses and governmental misconduct (Agbese, 2022).

Nigeria's press freedom ranking has declined significantly in recent years. According to Reporters Without Borders, Nigeria's press freedom status has been fluctuating over the last five years. On the World Press Freedom Index, Nigeria ranked 120th in 2019, 120th in 2021, 129th in 2022, 123rd in 2023, and 112th in 2024, indicating a hostile environment for journalists. Government agencies such as the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and security forces frequently suppress dissenting voices through regulatory fines, shutdowns, and legal threats (Ojebode, 2021).

The introduction of digital censorship laws and social media restrictions has further exacerbated the challenges faced by journalists in Nigeria. The Cybercrime Act (2015) has been used to arrest and prosecute journalists for their online reporting, while the Twitter ban (2021) demonstrated state control over digital spaces (Reporters Without Borders, 2023). These restrictions have stifled free speech, promoted self-censorship and discouraged investigative journalism (Amnesty International, 2021).

Cases such as the arrest of Agba Jalingo (2019), the shutdown of Daily Trust newspaper offices (2019) and the alleged killing of Alex Ogbu (2020) illustrate how censorship laws directly endanger journalists (Committee to Protect Journalists [CPJ], 2021). These incidents highlight the urgent need for legal reforms to safeguard press freedom in Nigeria.

Statement of Problem

Despite Nigeria's constitutional guarantee of freedom of expression under Section 39 of the 1999 Constitution, the government continues to enforce laws that restrict press freedom (Ojebode, 2021). Laws such as the Cybercrime Act (2015), the Nigeria Press Council Act (NPC Act), and the National Broadcasting Code have been weaponised against journalists who publish critical reports (Agbese, 2022).

Journalists covering controversial topics such as election fraud, government corruption and insurgency face arbitrary arrests and detentions, threats and physical attacks from political actors, forced self-censorship due to fear of prosecution, social media surveillance and digital restrictions.

While past researches have explored press freedom in Nigeria, there are limited empirical data on firsthand accounts from journalist on how these laws and government actions directly affect journalists' safety (Dare, 2020). In light of these gap, this study seeks to contribute to the growing body of knowledge by focusing specifically on the everyday realities of Nigerian journalists. By drawing directly from their experiences and reflections, this research aims to offer a grounded and context-sensitive understanding of censorship, its drivers and its broader implications for democratic expression and press autonomy.

Objectives of the Study This study aims to:

- Analyse how Nigerian media laws affect journalists' safety and press freedom,
- Document specific cases where journalists have been harassed, detained or harmed due to government actions,
- Assess the impact of censorship on journalism and media operations.

Research Questions

- How do Nigerian media laws impact journalists' safety?
- What forms of censorship do Nigerian journalists experience?
- How has government actions influenced press freedom in Nigeria?

Scope of the Study

This study focuses on Nigerian journalists across print, broadcast and online media platforms. It examines legislative policies impacting press freedom, case studies of journalists that have faced persecution and survey data on journalists' experiences with censorship and security threats.

Significance of the Study

This study will be beneficial to:

Journalists and Media Practitioners by understanding the risks associated with censorship, journalists can develop protective strategies while reporting on sensitive issues.

Media Regulatory Bodies as the study will highlight how repressive laws impact journalism, providing insights for policy reforms.

Policymakers and Legal Experts: findings will contribute to advocacy for media law reforms to protect press freedom.

Human Rights Organisations: by documenting cases of press suppression, this research will provide evidence for legal and international advocacy.

Methodology

Research Design: This study utilised a survey-based research design to assess journalists' experiences with censorship and security threats.

Participants: The study surveyed 21 Nigerian journalists across print, broadcast and online media.

Data Collection: An online survey through the instrument of a questionnaire was administered, covering age distribution, years of experience, media organisation type and experiences with censorship and threats, coping mechanism and impact on journalism in Nigeria.

Data Analysis: survey responses were analysed using descriptive statistics and visual graphs for quantitative statistical analysis while for qualitative analysis, content analysis was done to examine existing laws and documented cases of media repression to identify patterns of censorship and threats to press freedom. Reports from international organisations like the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), and academic studies were analysed to highlight recurring themes and case studies.

Empirical Review on Censorship and Media Freedom

Empirical research into censorship and its impact on media freedom has remained a vital strand of media and communication studies, especially within political contexts where democratic norms are weak or inconsistently applied. In many developing countries, particularly across Africa and Asia, state interference, restrictive legislation and ownership dynamics continue to limit the extent to which journalists can practise freely and hold power to account. Scholars have used both qualitative and quantitative methods to investigate how various forms of censorship, ranging from overt suppression to more subtle, institutional pressures, shape the content, tone and reach of journalism.

A number of studies have identified the legal and structural foundations of censorship in Nigeria's media landscape. Okon and Udofia (2020) examined the influence of state-imposed restrictions on journalistic output and found that legal threats, financial control and regulatory intimidation significantly alter media narratives. Their research pointed out that threats of licence suspension, arrests and politically motivated lawsuits have led to widespread self-censorship. Journalists, particularly those in government-sensitive beats such as corruption, governance and security, often avoid critical reporting in order to maintain professional and personal safety. This pattern, according to their study, reflects

not just fear of state retaliation but also the normalisation of censorship as part of institutional practice.

Adesoji (2019) explored the longer-term implications of censorship, especially as they relate to the decline of investigative journalism in Nigeria. His study found that journalists operating under repressive media environments tend to internalise fear, leading to a culture of risk aversion. As a result, many avoid stories that could attract official attention or political backlash. Adesoji argued that such self-censorship is not only an individual survival strategy but also a reflection of structural constraints, including restrictive laws like the Nigerian Press Council Act and the National Broadcasting Code. These instruments, while presented as regulatory tools, often function as mechanisms of political control.

Other empirical works have looked beyond Nigeria to draw comparisons with similar political settings. Johnson and Mensah (2020) conducted a comparative analysis of digital censorship laws in Nigeria and Ghana, focusing on how cybercrime legislation affects online journalism. Their findings show that while both countries have adopted regulatory frameworks to police the digital space, Nigeria's legal environment is notably more punitive. The study revealed that vague or broadly worded sections of the Cybercrime Act are frequently used to justify the arrest or harassment of journalists, bloggers and social media users who criticise public officials. By contrast, Ghana's approach, while still flawed, appeared to offer more legal clarity and judicial independence.

Khan and Patel (2021) expanded this comparative lens by examining how state-led censorship manifests in the media systems of India and Nigeria. Their study highlighted the global trend of using national security and cyber regulations to curtail press freedom. In both countries, the researchers found a recurring pattern: governments publicly commit to democratic principles while simultaneously enacting laws that stifle dissent. The authors pointed out that in Nigeria, journalists covering insurgency, elections or police brutality are often the most vulnerable, particularly when reporting on platforms that have broad public reach. Their findings suggest that the use of censorship is not only legal and institutional but also increasingly digital, targeting the growing influence of social media and online news platforms.

Another theme that emerges from these empirical studies is the role of ownership and commercial pressures in shaping editorial independence. Even in the absence of direct government intervention, media outlets may practise self-censorship to protect advertising revenue or appease politically connected proprietors. This indirect form of censorship, while less visible, can be just as damaging. Journalists working for both private and state-owned media often describe a climate where editorial decisions are made based on what will avoid political trouble, rather than on the public's right to know.

Collectively, these studies provide strong evidence that censorship in Nigeria and comparable democracies is multi-layered. It includes legal intimidation, economic manipulation, digital suppression, and institutionalised fear. The implications for press freedom are profound. When journalists are unable to report freely, democratic accountability weakens, public discourse narrows and civic participation declines. These findings underscore the urgent need for legal reforms, institutional safeguards and broader societal support for independent journalism.

Nigeria's Cybercrimes Act 2015 and Press Freedom

The Nigeria Cybercrimes Act 2015 has attracted significant scholarly attention due to its impact on digital rights and freedom of expression. Adegoke and Olatunji (2021) investigated the legal ambiguities within the Act, particularly its provisions on cyberstalking and false information. They noted that these broad and vaguely defined clauses often serve as legal instruments for suppressing dissenting voices, including journalists and human rights activists. Their findings align with Eze (2022), who conducted an empirical analysis of court cases involving media professionals and activists accused under the Cybercrimes Act. Eze's study revealed that the majority of such cases involve allegations of defamation and cyberstalking, often targeting individuals who criticise government policies on social media.

The political implications of the "yber'rimes Act have also been explored. According to Bello and Adeyemi (2023), the Act disproportionately affects independent journalists and online news platforms that operate outside the influence of mainstream media organisations. Their study highlighted how independent media outlets frequently face legal threats, which limit their ability to report on corruption and governance issues without fear of retribution. Moreover, the work of Afolayan (2020) demonstrated that the Act has contributed to an increase in digital surveillance, making it more difficult for journalists to protect their sources and conduct confidential investigations.

Media Ownership, Political Influence and Censorship

Another crucial aspect of censorship in Nigeria is the role of media ownership in shaping news content. Nwabueze (2018) examined the relationship between media ownership and editorial independence, arguing that private media ownership does not necessarily guarantee unbiased reporting. The study found that media organisations owned by political figures or business elites often engage in selective reporting that aligns with the interests of their proprietors. This finding is supported by Musa and Ahmed (2020), who analysed patterns of news reporting in both state and privately owned media. Their study concluded that while state-owned media outlets function as propaganda tools for the

government, privately owned media are also susceptible to editorial influence due to economic and political affiliations.

Furthermore, research has shown that economic pressures contribute to censorship. According to Yusuf (2021), advertising revenue plays a significant role in determining media content, as companies and political sponsors often exert influence over editorial policies. This dynamic results in the suppression of news stories that could negatively impact major advertisers or politically connected individuals. Yusuf's study highlights how economic dependencies can serve as an indirect form of censorship, limiting journalists' ability to cover sensitive issues.

Digital Media, Resistance and Alternative Platforms

Despite the challenges posed by censorship, digital media platforms have provided alternative spaces for journalistic expression and resistance against restrictive policies. Odu (2021) documented the use of social media by journalists and activists as a means of circumventing censorship. The study highlighted that platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube serve as vital tools for disseminating information that mainstream media might avoid due to legal and political pressures. Odu's findings resonate with those of Bello and Adeyemi (2023), who examined the strategies employed by online news platforms to navigate restrictive regulations. Their research found that encryption technologies, anonymous reporting and international collaborations have become essential tools for digital journalists seeking to evade state surveillance and censorship. Moreover, scholars have explored how grassroots movements leverage digital platforms to challenge restrictive media laws. Adebayo and Okonkwo (2022) analysed the role of civil society organisations in advocating for press freedom in Nigeria. Their study found that online campaigns and international advocacy efforts have played a crucial role in pushing back against government attempts to suppress independent media. This aligns with the work of Chukwu (2020), who examined how Nigerian journalists collaborate with international press freedom organisations to resist censorship. Chukwu's research highlighted how global media networks provide both legal and financial support to journalists facing persecution.

Cases of Media Laws Affecting Journalists' Safety in Nigeria

In Nigeria, media laws are often used as tools for censorship, repression and control over journalists and media houses. While some laws are intended to regulate the media landscape, others have been misused by the government to suppress dissenting voices, intimidate journalists and criminalise investigative journalism (Ojebode, 2021). Many of these laws contain vague provisions that allow for arbitrary arrests, prolonged detentions and hefty fines on journalists and media organisations (CPJ, 2021).

The following are seven major cases where media laws have been used to endanger journalists' safety, restrict press freedom and suppress independent reporting in Nigeria.

The Nigerian Press Council (NPC) Act (enacted in 1992, Amended 2019)

The Nigerian Press Council (NPC) Act grants the government broad powers to regulate, fine and shut down media outlets that publish content deemed “false” or “offensive.” Under the amended version proposed in 2019 states that the government could suspend or revoke the licenses of newspapers and broadcasters. Journalists could face fines and imprisonment for failing to register with the NPC. The government could interfere in editorial decisions, limiting press independence.

The Crackdown on Premium Times (2018)

In 2018, the Nigerian Army accused Premium Times of publishing “false information” regarding military operations. The newspaper’s editor, Samuel Ogunديpe, was arrested under the NPC Act for refusing to disclose his sources (Amnesty International, 2021). His detention sparked widespread condemnation, as it underscored how the law was being weaponised against investigative journalism.

Assault on Premium Times Journalists (2019)

Journalists covering the 2019 general elections were physically attacked by political thugs and security operatives. Their cameras and phones were confiscated to prevent documentation of electoral fraud. Election periods are especially dangerous for journalists, as they face intimidation from both state and non-state actors (CPJ, 2021).

The Cybercrime Act (2015)

The Cybercrime Act of 2015 is one of the most controversial laws used to silence journalists. It criminalise “cyberstalking,” “defamation,” and “publishing false information online,” with penalties including fines of up to ₦7 million (\$15,000) or three years in prison (Dare, 2020).

Agba Jalingo’s Arrest and Detention (2019)

Journalist Agba Jalingo was arrested in 2019 under the Cybercrime Act after publishing an article exposing financial mismanagement by Cross River State Governor, Ben Ayade. He was detained for over five months, denied bail multiple times and charged with terrorism (CPJ, 2021). His case demonstrates how the Cybercrime Act is used to target journalists who report on government corruption.

The Official Secrets Act (1962, Revised 2004)

The Official Secrets Act criminalises the publication of government documents and classified information. Journalists who publish leaked information or expose government wrongdoing can face up to 14 years in prison (Reporters Without Borders, 2023).

The Arrest of Jones Abiri (2016 & 2019)

In 2016, investigative journalist, Jones Abiri was arrested by the Department of State Services (DSS) and held in detention for over two years without trial under the Official Secrets Act.

He was accused of publishing sensitive security information regarding the Niger Delta crisis.

After being released in 2018, he was re-arrested in 2019 for another six months on vague charges of “cyberstalking”. His case exemplifies how the Nigerian government uses secrecy laws to justify arbitrary arrests and prolonged detentions of journalists.

The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) Code (2020 Amendment)

The NBC Code was amended in 2020 to include stricter regulations on broadcast media. Under the amendment:

Media houses can be fined up to ₦5 million (\$11,000) for airing “controversial” content. Licenses can be revoked if broadcasters are deemed to be promoting “hate speech” or “unpatriotic reporting.” Online radio and TV stations must register with the NBC, giving the government control over digital media.

The Suspension of Channels TV (2021)

In April 2021, Channels TV was fined and briefly suspended for airing an interview with an opposition leader critical of the government. The NBC accused the station of “inciting public unrest” as the interview was seen as promoting divisive content that could undermine national security, even though it was reporting on a legitimate political issue (CPJ, 2021). This case highlights how the NBC Code is used to punish media houses that air dissenting opinions. The action led to debates on press freedom and government censorship in Nigeria. Many rights activists and organisations saw the suspension as part of a broader pattern of media repression in Nigeria, arguing that it threatened journalistic independence and the public’s right to information.

The Terrorism (Prevention) Act (2011, Revised 2013)

The Terrorism Act criminalises the reporting of “terrorist activities” without government approval. Journalists covering insurgencies, conflicts, or military operations can be accused of promoting terrorism (Ojebode, 2021).

Daily Trust Newspaper Raid (2019)

In January 2019, military personnel raided the offices of Daily Trust newspaper, arresting journalists and seizing computers. The newspaper had published an article about military strategies against Boko Haram. Authorities accused it of “leaking classified security information,” even though the report was based on publicly available intelligence (Amnesty International, 2021).

This case highlights how security laws are used to intimidate media houses reporting on conflict zones.

The Social Media Bill (Not yet passed, but used in practice)

The Protection from Internet Falsehood and Manipulations Bill (also known as the Social Media Bill) seeks to restrict online speech, making it illegal to criticise the government on social media. Grant the government the power to shut down social media platforms. Impose heavy fines and prison terms for journalists publishing “misleading information” online.

The Twitter Ban (2021)

Although, the Social Media Bill has not been passed, the Nigerian government enforced a seven month Twitter ban in 2021, preventing journalists from using the platform to report on government actions.

During this period, journalists were arrested for using Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) to access Twitter. The ban crippled digital journalism and restricted access to real-time news (Reporters Without Borders, 2023). This incident demonstrates the government’s intent to control online media spaces and limit press freedom in the digital age.

The cases above show that media laws in Nigeria are frequently used as tools of repression rather than regulation. These laws enable the arrest, detention and harassment of journalists, discourage investigative journalism and promote self-censorship and restrict media organisations through fines, license suspensions, and outright closures

Theoretical Framework

The role of legal frameworks, censorship, and media regulation in shaping journalistic practice has been widely examined through various theoretical perspectives. These perspectives offer critical insights into the balance between media freedom and government intervention, the ethical responsibilities of the press, and the broader implications of restrictive policies on freedom of expression. This study draws on three major theories: Libertarian Theory of the Press, Social Responsibility Theory and the Chilling Effect Theory, to explore the philosophical and practical foundations of media freedom, the responsibilities that come with it, and the consequences of excessive regulation on journalistic expression.

Each of these theories contributes to the understanding of the press as both an independent institution and a social actor, highlighting the tensions between absolute freedom, ethical journalism and the legal consequences of restrictive media policies. By examining these theories, this framework sets the foundation for understanding how media regulations influence journalistic practices, the dissemination of information and democratic engagement in both traditional and digital media landscapes.

Libertarian Theory of the Press

The Libertarian Theory of the Press is rooted in classical liberal philosophy, which advocates for minimal government intervention in the affairs of individuals and institutions, including the press. This theory emerged during the 17th and 18th centuries as a response to authoritarian rule, censorship and government control over public discourse. It is most closely associated with the works of thinkers such as John Milton, John Locke, and John Stuart Mill, who argued that unrestricted access to information and open debate lead to the discovery of truth and the advancement of society (Siebert et al., 1956).

Libertarianism assumes that the press should operate independently, free from government interference, with its primary role being to inform the public, facilitate democratic discourse, and serve as a watchdog against government overreach. This theory posits that a free marketplace of ideas is essential for democracy, where competing viewpoints can coexist and the public can make informed decisions. The press, under this model, is expected to self-regulate rather than be controlled by the state, as it is believed that rational individuals can discern truth from falsehood through open discussion.

However, critics of the libertarian model argue that it overestimates the rationality of the audience and ignores the potential for misinformation, media bias and corporate influence. In contemporary media landscapes, the rise of digital misinformation, media conglomeration and algorithmic news curation challenges the ideal of a truly free and balanced information marketplace. Additionally, the libertarian model assumes that all voices have equal access to platforms, disregarding structural inequalities that can marginalise certain groups from public discourse.

Despite these critiques, libertarian theory remains a foundational perspective in discussions on media freedom, emphasising that governmental restrictions on speech should be minimal to allow for the unfettered exchange of ideas. In democratic societies, media policies are often influenced by libertarian ideals, ensuring that legal protections for journalists and press institutions prevent censorship and government overreach.

Social Responsibility Theory

The Social Responsibility Theory was developed in the mid-20th century as a response to the limitations of the libertarian model. While the libertarian perspective emphasised

absolute press freedom, the Hutchins Commission on Freedom of the Press (1947) argued that such freedom must be accompanied by responsibility. This theory asserts that the media has an obligation to act in the public interest, ensuring that information is accurate, fair and beneficial to society (McQuail, 2010).

According to this theory, the media should serve as a forum for public debate, provide a voice for marginalised groups and contribute to social cohesion rather than simply functioning as a commercial entity driven by profit. The press, under the social responsibility model, must adhere to ethical journalistic standards that include:

1. Truth and Accuracy – Ensuring that information is factual and not misleading,
2. Objectivity and Fairness – Presenting multiple perspectives on issues of public interest,
3. Public Accountability – Serving the needs of the audience rather than corporate or political interests,
4. Avoidance of Harm – Preventing the spread of harmful, defamatory or inflammatory content.

Unlike libertarian theory, which assumes that self-regulation is sufficient, the social responsibility model suggests that limited government intervention may be necessary to prevent media monopolies, misinformation and unethical reporting practices. Regulatory bodies such as press councils, media ombudsmen and broadcasting commissions are often aligned with this theoretical framework, ensuring that media organisations uphold ethical standards while still maintaining press freedom.

In the digital era, social responsibility theory has gained renewed importance as issues such as fake news, digital disinformation, deep fake technology and media polarisation raise concerns about the ethical responsibilities of journalists and tech platforms. The challenge remains in striking a balance between maintaining press freedom and ensuring that the media does not contribute to social harm through unchecked dissemination of false or manipulative content.

Chilling Effect Theory

The Chilling Effect Theory examines the ways in which legal restrictions, government surveillance and the threat of punishment can suppress free expression. This theory posits that even the mere existence of punitive laws or vague legal frameworks can discourage individuals from exercising their right to free speech, leading to self-censorship and reduced diversity in public discourse (Schauer, 1978).

The chilling effect occurs when journalists, media practitioners or the general public avoid discussing controversial or politically sensitive topics due to fear of legal repercussions, professional consequences or personal safety risks. This phenomenon is particularly significant in contexts where defamation laws, cybercrime legislation, national security policies and regulatory measures impose severe penalties for speech-related offenses.

Some key factors contributing to the chilling effect include:

1. Ambiguous or Broad Laws – vaguely worded legislation that can be interpreted expansively to criminalise speech,
2. Legal Precedents and Case Law -past prosecutions that set examples, discouraging others from engaging in similar speech,
3. Surveillance and Monitoring – government surveillance programs that create a sense of being watched, discouraging open discourse,
4. Economic Pressures – the financial burden of legal defense can deter individuals from speaking out, particularly independent journalists.

The chilling effect has been widely studied in relation to whistle blowing, investigative journalism and digital activism, where individuals who expose corruption, governmental misconduct or corporate malpractices often face legal intimidation. Scholars argue that a strong legal framework for press protection, transparency in governance and judicial independence are essential in mitigating the chilling effect and ensuring that journalists can operate without undue restrictions.

The rise of digital platforms and social media has further complicated the chilling effect, as governments and corporations increasingly employ content moderation algorithms, de-platforming policies and cyber security laws to regulate online discourse. The interplay between legal restrictions, technological control and self-censorship continues to shape the landscape of contemporary media and journalism.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

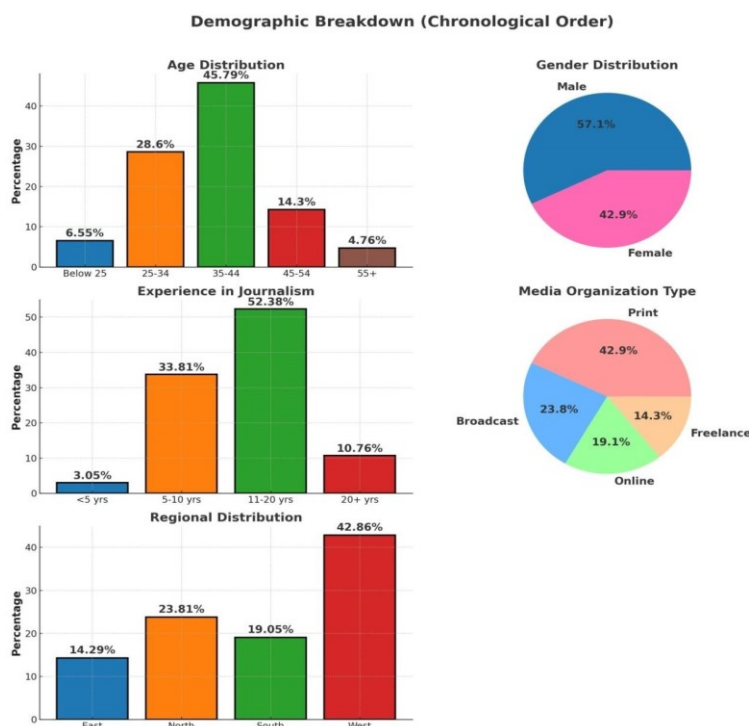


Figure 1: Demographics and Experience

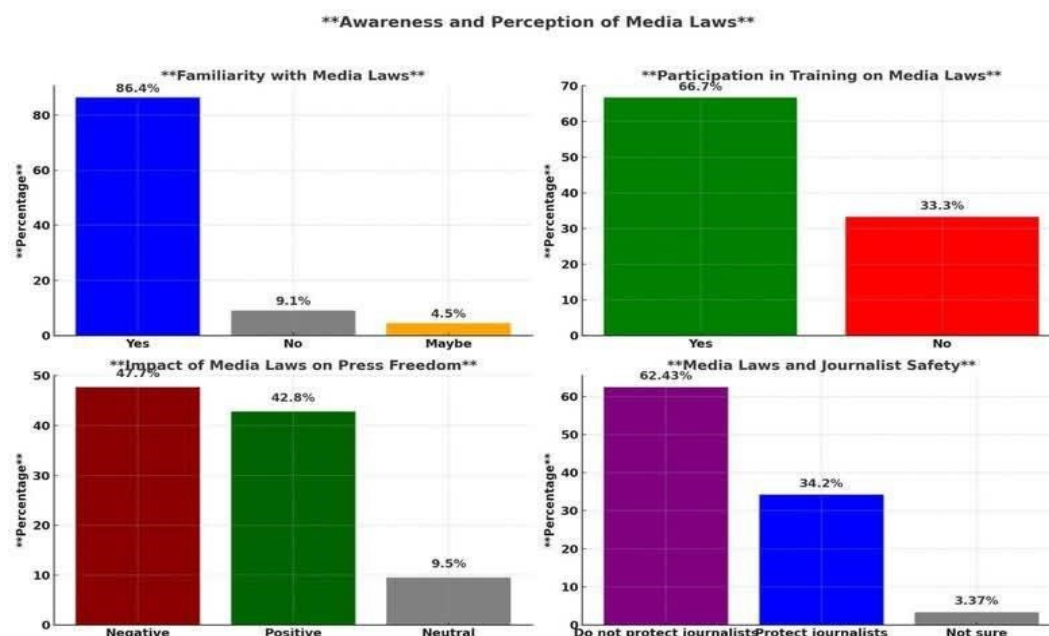


Figure 2: Awareness and Perception of Media Laws

These figures indicate that many respondents are aware of the media laws and were significantly exposed to the challenges of press freedom in Nigeria, making them credible sources for understanding the safety risks involved in journalism.

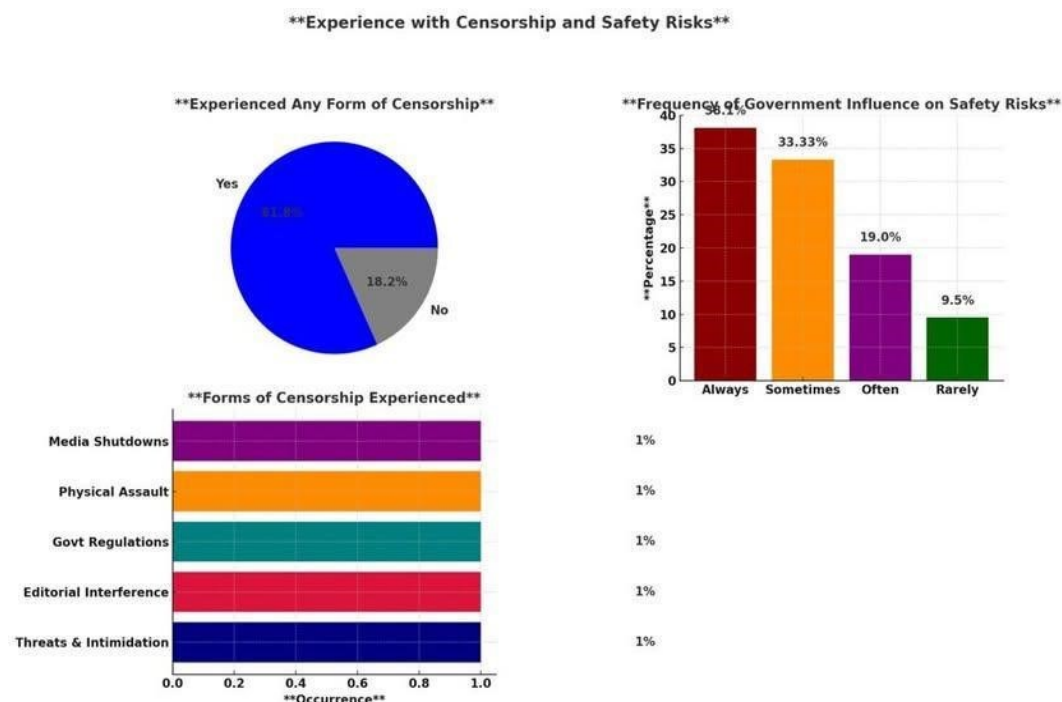


Figure 3: Experience with Censorship

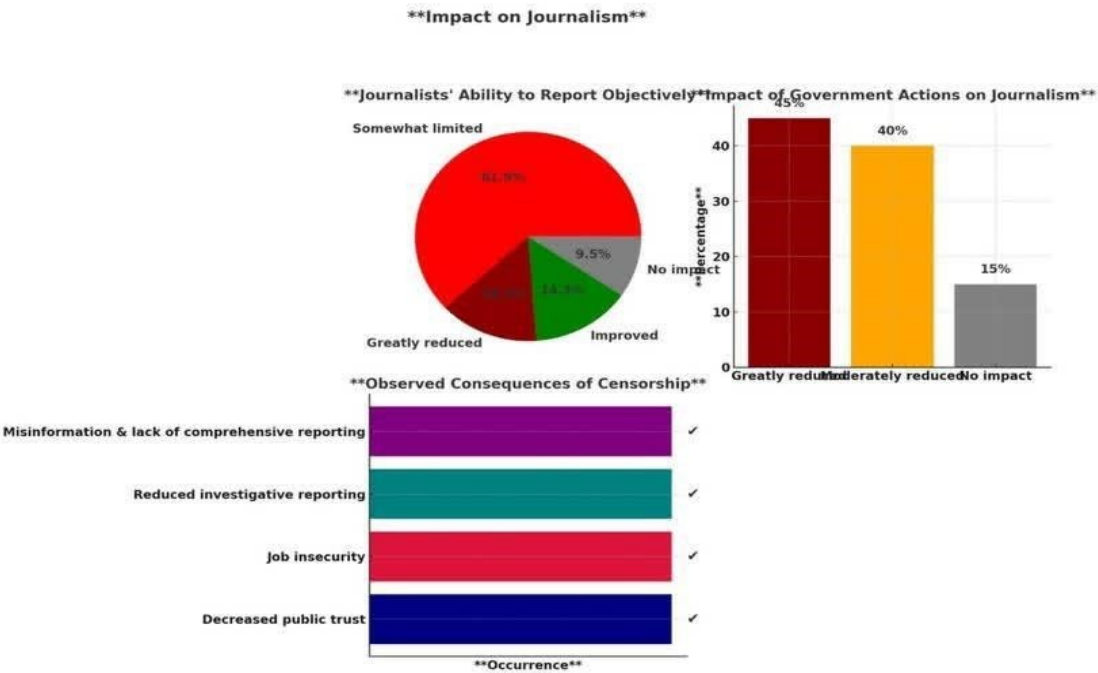


Figure 4: Impact on Journalistic Quality

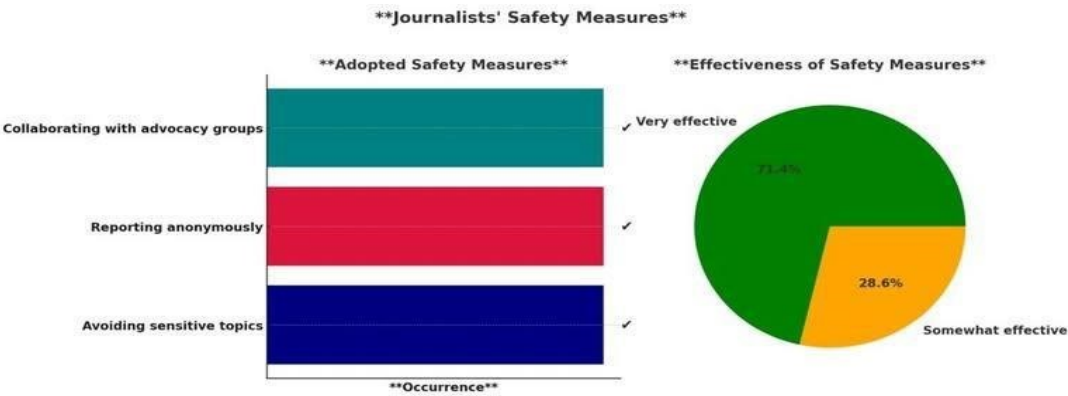


Figure 5: Safety Measures and Effectiveness

Discussion of Findings

The findings from this study show that censorship has a strong and far-reaching impact on journalism and freedom of expression in Nigeria. Government regulations, political influence and economic pressures are key forces shaping how media organisations operate and how journalists work. While censorship is often framed as necessary for national security or public order, the evidence suggests that these justifications are regularly used to suppress journalistic independence and restrict public access to information.

One of the clearest findings is the role of legal frameworks such as the Cybercrime Act, which, though designed to regulate online activity, is frequently applied in ways that target critical voices. Several journalists described how such laws are used selectively, especially when reporting on politically sensitive issues. This confirms earlier studies which warn that vague laws can be turned into tools of political control rather than fair regulation (Adegoke and Olatunji, 2021).

The study also highlights the economic side of censorship. Media ownership plays a significant role in shaping content. Owners often have political or commercial interests that influence editorial direction. This supports the argument from political economy theory that those who control media institutions often control what the public sees and hears (McChesney, 2008). Journalists working in private media indicated that there is pressure to avoid stories that might upset owners or key advertisers. In state-owned media, the editorial line often aligns closely with government narratives.

Another prominent theme is self-censorship. Many journalists reported that they deliberately avoid certain topics or water down their reports out of fear; fear of losing their jobs, facing lawsuits or being threatened physically. This behaviour reflects what Foucault (1977) described as disciplinary power, where people monitor and limit themselves even without direct punishment. This form of internal censorship leads to safer, but often less meaningful, journalism.

The rise of digital censorship is another important finding. While social media once offered a space for freer expression, this study shows that online platforms are increasingly monitored. Several participants noted incidents where their content was taken down or their accounts suspended after posting critical material. This finding aligns with Smith and Jones (2019), who argue that digital spaces are now major battlegrounds for control over information.

Despite these challenges, the study also shows that journalists are not without agency. Some have adopted creative ways to continue reporting, such as using anonymous bylines, publishing on international platforms, or working with civil society organisations. These strategies show the resilience of media professionals, but also reveal how difficult it has become to practise journalism freely.

In summary, this study confirms that censorship in Nigeria is complex and multi-layered. It operates through legal threats, economic control, internal newsroom culture and digital restrictions. All of these limit the freedom of journalists and reduce the space for investigative reporting and public debate. These findings contribute to ongoing discussions about media freedom by showing how censorship evolves with technology and political power. Future research should continue exploring practical solutions for protecting journalists and promoting more open media environments.

Conclusion

These findings underscore the severe challenges that Nigerian journalists face due to censorship, restrictive media laws and government actions that threaten press freedom. Despite constitutional guarantees of free expression, journalists operate under significant legal and physical threats that hinder their ability to report truthfully and independently. Government regulations, such as the Cybercrime Act, have been systematically used to criminalise journalistic activities, leading to arbitrary arrests, intimidation, and widespread self-censorship among media practitioners. This study has demonstrated that media laws, instead of serving their regulatory function, have become instruments of suppression, stifling free speech and gradually eroding public trust in the press.

This study also revealed that the consequences of this suppression extend beyond the media industry, affecting democratic governance, accountability and the public's right to access reliable information. The declining state of investigative journalism in Nigeria is a direct consequence of these threats, as journalists increasingly avoid politically sensitive or controversial topics to safeguard their personal safety and professional careers. The suppression of media freedom ultimately weakens the democratic fabric of the country, leaving corruption and human rights abuses unchecked.

Recommendations

- **Policy Reforms:** The Nigerian government should revise existing media laws, such as the Cybercrime Act and the proposed Social Media Bill, to eliminate provisions that restrict press freedom. Legislative reforms should focus on aligning Nigerian laws with international press freedom standards, such as those established by UNESCO and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.
- **Legal Protection for Journalists:** The government should establish stronger legal frameworks that shield journalists from harassment, violence and arbitrary arrests. This includes setting up an independent body to investigate and prosecute cases of attacks against journalists.
- **Training and Awareness:** Journalists should receive training on media rights, digital security and self-protection strategies. Media organisations should also provide legal aid to journalists facing prosecution.
- **International Support and Advocacy:** International human rights and press freedom organisations should continue to exert pressure on the Nigerian government to uphold press freedom. Bodies like the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and Amnesty International should strengthen advocacy campaigns and diplomatic engagement to protect media professionals in Nigeria.
- **Media Houses and Civil Society Involvement:** Media organisations should collaborate with civil society groups to push for media reforms and resist

oppressive laws. There should also be the establishment of whistleblower protection mechanisms to encourage journalists to report corruption and other malpractices without fear of victimisation.

By implementing these recommendations, Nigeria can create a safer environment for journalists, ensuring that the media continues to play its critical role in promoting democracy and holding power to account.

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