

# Comparative Analysis of Press Freedom in Nigeria under the Administrations of Presidents Goodluck Ebele Jonathan and Muhammadu Buhari (2010-2020)

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## ABSTRACT

In Nigeria, successive governments have sought to restrain and control the media, whether military regime or civilian administration. This article attempts a comparative analysis of the state of press freedom in the Fourth Republic with particular attention to the administrations of Presidents Goodluck Ebele Jonathan and Muhammadu Buhari. The study aims to investigate the forms of impunity committed against press freedom and assess illegal arrests of journalists and media workers during the administrations of presidents Jonathan and Buhari. The social responsibility and authoritarian theories were adopted. The study adopted the qualitative research design using an interview guide and document analysis for data collection. 20 Key Informants were selected through both the purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Internet-sourced documents, published newspapers, and magazine reports were utilised for secondary data. Data analysis was carried out using NVivo and thematic analysis. The study established that both the administrations of GEJ (43 cases) and PMB (42 cases) almost equally committed several acts of impunity against the press; both administrations were found wanting of arbitrary detention and arrest of media workers. Therefore, the study recommends the need for media workers and civil society organisations to remain vigilant in championing press freedom.

**Keywords:** Press, press freedom, impunity

## INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's journey to the Fourth Republic came with intense state repression of the media by successive military regimes. On the attainment of the Fourth Republic, Nigerians heaved a sigh of relief, hoping to see an end to flagrant human rights violations and a free press that would hold government accountable to them without prior needless restraints. But this hope seemed nebulous. However, social scientists have attempted to study the pattern of press freedom in the Fourth Republic. For example, Olukotun (2018) and Ogbondah (2018) chronicled the spate of media disruptions, arrests, and detention of journalists during the Fourth Republic. There were a series of infractions committed by the civilian government against the press such as the closure of Weekly Insider (in 2004), the arrest of editors, seizure of copies of Leadership, The Nation, Daily Trust, and The Punch newspapers (in June 2014), and eviction of the State House correspondent of The Punch, Olalekan Adetayo in 2017 over a story connected to the ill-health of President Muhammadu Buhari (Olukotun, 2018; Ogbondah, 2018).

Moreover, Freedom Radio was shut down in 2006, Channels Television in Lagos was suspended in 2008, and its editors were detained. Similarly, on April 27, 2015, the government barred the African Independent

Television (AIT) from covering the activities of the then President-elect, Muhammadu Buhari; and the publisher of Premium *Times* was arrested in January 2017 over a report considered to be critical of the Chief of Army Staff, General Tukur Buratai. These undemocratic acts are taming the press from performing its assigned constitutional role.

In any liberal democratic state, the press is expected to perform certain functions within the political system (Fayemi, 2019). These functions include surveillance of developments, both positive and negative, which may affect citizens' welfare; agenda-setting – that is, identifying key issues in the politics; offering accessible platforms for intelligible, illuminating advocacy by politicians and interest groups. It also includes serving as a bridge for dialogue across a wide range of views by power-holders, aspirants to political offices, and the citizenry; holding public officials accountable for their use and misuse of power; educating and motivating citizenry about politics – including electoral politics – and participation in civic life; and maintaining independence and integrity (Gurevitch & Blumler 1990, pp. 269-289).

Section 22 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria empowers the media to monitor the governance and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the governed to the people. Press freedom appears hampered during military regimes and civilian administrations in Nigeria. This study seeks to examine how the media fared about press freedom between 2010 and 2020. President Muhammadu Buhari (PMB), as a former military Head of State in 1984, promulgated several Decrees, of which the most popular and fiercest Decree 4 of 1984 was directed at the media. Having this military background, and now his second coming as a civilian President, the study seeks to establish whether his antecedent as a military president will have a significant effect on press freedom as it were in 1984 by juxtaposing it to the administration of a well-bred civilian administration of President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan (GEJ) that piloted the affairs of Nigeria between 2011 and 2015.

### Statement of the Problem

Previous studies revealed that even though the media have enjoyed more freedom in the period since 1999 (Olukotun, 2018; Agbaje and Adebani, 2004), there are still critical doubts as to the degree and dimensions of these freedoms. Do individuals with impeccable military backgrounds and professional exposure become more predisposed to authoritarian leadership styles than individuals with civil backgrounds, education, and experience? Specifically, would the administration of President GEJ, a man with a doctoral degree and purely civilian background, be more accommodating of press freedom than Muhammadu Buhari, a President with a military background and antecedent in office as Head of State? The political campaign messages of PMB in 2015 projected him as a repentant democrat. To what extent does PMB's disposition to the press reflect his commitment to the ethos of democracy?

During the presidential election in 2015, campaign messages of the PDP indicated that President GEJ was more disposed to democratic ethos than PMB, a former General and Head of State. As a military Head of State in 1984, General Buhari introduced and enforced Decree 4 of 1984, which placed restrictions on freedom of expression and of the press. The two personalities (GEJ and PMB) were products of two distinct backgrounds and attributes, thus necessitating the need to compare and contrast the state of press freedom during their respective administration. The periodization of the study is between 2010 and 2020. This means that the study focused on the administration of President Jonathan, which spanned five years (2010-2015) and the five years of President Buhari out of the eight years.

### CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

According to Stevenson, press freedom refers to “the right to speak, broadcast or publish without prior restraint by or permission of the government, but with limited legal accountability after publication for violations of law” (Stevenson, 2004, p. 68). Curran (2011) sees press freedom from two variants: the classic liberal perspective and the radical democratic perspective. According to Curran, the classic liberal perspective advocates freedom of the press to publish or broadcast. The radical democratic perspective focuses attention on how the press as an agent of social mobilisation can “mediate in an equitable way conflict and competition between social groups in society.” Curran argued that the classical liberal perspective of the media should seek

to shield the individual from the arbitrary abuses of the state (government). Price (2002) says the basic “foundation requirement” for press freedom is that the government does not and should not have a monopoly on information. Rozumilowicz’s (2002) view on press freedom differs from the views of other scholars. Rozumilowicz’s argument is based on the assumption that there must be a blend of control and access supported by a country’s institutional legal frameworks, and economic and socio-cultural systems. Accordingly, free and sovereign media “exist within a structure which is effectively demonopolized of the control of any concentrated social groups or forces and in which access is both equally and effectively guaranteed.”

Rozumilowicz argued that such media are better equipped to maintain and support the competitive and participative components that shape democracy and to improve the process of democratization. Her argument is built on the foundation that free and independent media also support the tenets of democracy, create a balanced economic structure, strengthen cultural understanding, and create avenues for overall human development. In this manner, free media also permits individuals to find a public space to ventilate opinions, beliefs, and viewpoints to their contemporaries.

Gunther and Mughan (2000) reasoned that political elites and opinion leaders in different systems of governments admitted that the media are influential in moulding public opinions and they attempt to initiate policies that are in tandem and correspond to their economic, social, and political purposes. According to Ogunsiji (1989), freedom of the press denotes permitting the press to carry out its traditional role of keeping the people informed about events taking place within and outside their community without interference, harassment, or legal or social constraints.

Okunna (1990) noted that “the synthesis of the concept of media freedom is that the press can only be free insofar as it operates within the ambit of the law” (p. 141). Okunna explained further that every society has control over its mass media about its policies and needs. She emphasised that the most important consideration in such an environment is the dimension and degree of control, which largely depends on the political and economic ideology of such a society.

The press (or the media) – which includes print, broadcast, and Internet media are channels for the dissemination of information, sensitisation, and conscientisation of the people concerning equipping them with insights into the goings-on in their environment and around the world. The Nigerian press has remained one of the most vilified and acclaimed institutions in the country in recent times. While it has been commended by some, others have seriously condemned it for irresponsible, reckless, and sensational journalism (Akinfeleye 2003). The press, according to Akinfeleye (2003), “is to watchdog, check on to *uncover* and never to cover up corruption and/or wrongdoings by the other three estates. They are also to monitor governance and make the other three estates accountable to the people at all times.”

Democracy is regarded as the most embraced and practiced system of government in most countries of the world today. Obasanjo and Mabogunje (1992), as cited in Ogah & Ogeyni (2014:55), democracy is:

An ideology is the philosophy of governance that sets a high premium on the basic freedom or fundamental human rights of the citizens, the rule of law, the property right, the free flow of information, and the right of choice between alternative political positions.

It is a system of government in which sovereignty is vested in the people rather than in a small clique or an oligarchy, where the rule of law, majority rule, and constitutionalism are basic guiding principles of governance. How democracy is practiced in Nigeria negates its basic principles as outlined by various scholars. Instead of the majority having their way in the process of governance, a few cabals have hijacked the state of affairs in the state. And any attempt to challenge the powers that be would amount to the brutal maltreatment of the fundamental rights of the innocent and suffering masses (Omenugha, et. al, 2012).

Suntai and Targema (2017) say that democracy entails the freedom of each individual to participate in the political community’s self-government. They pointed out that political freedom lies at the heart of the concept of democracy. Democracy connotes rule by the people through free and fair elections among other forms of

participation, and that is why the Athenians of ancient Greece, progenitors of the concept, define it as, “government of the people, by the people and for the people” (Suntai et. al, 2018). Galadima and Goshit (2013) note that democracy entails popular sovereignty, political equality, recognition of the consent of the governed, as well as regular and periodic free and fair elections.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Normative theories are more focused on the relationship between the press and the government than the press and the audience. These theories are more concerned about the ownership of the media and who controls the press or media in the country. For this study, social responsibility and authoritarian theories were adopted. McQuail (2010/1987) offered the basic principles of social responsibility that the press is expected to abide by within a society. McQuail emphasises that the media should accept and fulfill certain obligations to society. These obligations include media setting high or professional standards of informativeness, truth, accuracy, objectivity, and balance. It also cautioned that the media should avoid whatever might lead to crime, violence, or civil disorder or give offense to minority groups. The main assertion of McQuail’s doctrine is that journalists and media professionals should be accountable to society as well as to employers and the market. The caveat is that in accepting and applying these obligations, media should be self-regulating within the framework of law and established institutions (McQuail, 2010).

The major policy thrust of the authoritarian system is to entrench press restraints and controls over the privately owned media. The autocratic government often believes that state information, when circulated, might compromise national security. Thus, the exercise of authoritarian theory is justified by the government on the assumption that the state is greater than individual rights, where the state controls the media, especially in times of emergencies like wars and conflicts (Bajracharya, 2018). However, scholars (Baran and Davis, 2009; Anaeto, Onabajo, and Osifeso, 2008; Folarin, 1998; Severin and Tankard, 1997; McQuail, 2010) noted that the press in authoritarian regimes are constrained to do the bidding of the established authority, and failure to do so will result to fierce intimidation and clampdown on the press. The press in the authoritarian system of government is bound to be subordinate to established authority (McQuail, 2010).

## **METHODS**

The study adopted the qualitative research design using in-depth interviews (IDI). The interview guide was used to collect data from the key informants. 20 Key Informants were selected through non-probability purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The researcher ensured that the key informants selected for the study have not least 10 years of cognate experience in the media environment, and thus, understand Nigeria’s political terrain. The key informants cut across Chief Executive Officers of media organisations, editors, national and state members of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE), and National Association of Women Journalists (NAWOJ), scholars, political actors, and civil society organisations. NVivo was used to analyse and interpret data sourced from IDI. It was blended with thematic analysis, based on the research objectives. The results of the qualitative data are now discussed, based on the two specific objectives guiding the study.

### **Impunity Against the Press During the Administrations of Presidents Goodluck Ebele Jonathan and Muhammadu Buhari**

This study aims to analyse the perceptions of the informants on various forms of impunity against the press in Nigeria during the administrations of Presidents Buhari and Jonathan. In the data presentation and discussion that follow, the NVivo data are presented using appropriate figures. The analysis and discussion follow, using excerpts from the Key Informants supported by relevant data through document observation. Secondary data on impunity against the press by Presidents Jonathan and Buhari were presented first, followed by primary data from the Key Informant Interview.



## Documentary Data on Form of Impunity Committed against the Press

Table 1. Documentary Data on Impunity Committed against the Press during the Administration of President Jonathan

S/N	Name	Media Organisation	Form of Impunity	Aggressor	Year
1.	Yusuf Ali	The Nation	Threatened	Police	2010
2.	Olusola Fabiyi	The Punch	Threatened	Police	2010
3.	Chuks Okocha	This Day	Threatened	Police	2010
4.	Gbenga Aruleba	AIT	Threatened	Police	2010
5.	Aminu Abdulla	Agence France-Presse	Assaulted	Police	2010
6.	Media House	CNN offices	Harassed	DSS	2012
7.	Umar Uthman	AIT	Camera seized	Police Officers	2012
8.	Cameraman	Kaduna State TV	Camera Seized	Police Officers	2012
9.	Oluwale Adeboye	The News magazine and PM News	Obstructed from interviewing Saraki	Police Officers	2012
10.	Emmanuel Oshodi	The News magazine and PM News	Obstructed from interviewing Saraki	Police Officers	2012
11.	Benjamin Ezeamalu	Premium Times Online	Obstructed from interviewing Saraki	Police Officers	2012
12.	Eniola Akinkuotu	The Punch	Obstructed from interviewing Saraki	Police Officers	2012
13.	Albert Akpor	Vanguard Newspaper	Obstructed from interviewing Saraki	Police Officers	2012
14.	Wisdom Patrick	Daily Independent	Obstructed from interviewing Saraki	Police Officers	2012
15.	Bashir Abdullahi	Daily Trust	Assaulted	Task Force/Military Officers	2012
16.	Joshua Uma	Daily Leadership	Assaulted	Police Officers	2012
17.	Wahab Abdullahi	Vanguard newspaper	Assaulted	Court police officer	2012
18.	Adewale Busari	Silverbird Television	Assault	Court police officer	2012
19.	Paulinus Odedevi,	Camerama, Channels TV	Equipment confiscated	Court police officer	2012
20.	Chris Atsaka,	Chairman, NUJ, Benue	Assaulted	DSS	2013
21.	Rose Ejembi	The Sun Newspaper	Threatened	Police	2013
22.	Laolu Harolds	Nigerian Tribune	Beaten and the camera confiscated	Soldiers	2013
23.	Media House	Premium Times	Invaded	Soldiers/DSS	2013
24.	Media House	Sahara reporters	Invaded	Soldiers/DSS	2013
25.	Media House	Leadership	Distribution raided, assaulted	Vans Staff	2014
26.	Media House	BusinessDay	Distribution raided, assaulted	Vans Staff	2014
27.	Media House	Complete sports	Distribution raided, assaulted	Vans Staff	2014

28	Media House	Newswatch	Distribution Vans raided, Staff assaulted	Soldiers	2014
29	Media House	National Mirror	Distribution Vans Staff raided, assaulted	Soldiers	2014
30	Media House	Osun Defender	Distribution Vans Staff raided, assaulted	Soldiers	2014
31	Media House	Vanguard	Distribution Vans Staff raided, assaulted	Soldiers	2014
32	Media House	Punch	Distribution Vans Staff raided, assaulted	Soldiers	2014
33	Media House	The Nation	Distribution Vans Staff raided, Staff assaulted	Soldiers	2014
34	Media House	Daily Trust	Distribution Vans Staff raided, Staff assaulted	Soldiers	2014
35	Media House	Punch	Destroyed copies of the newspaper	Nigerian Military	2014
36	Media House	Leadership	Destroyed copies of the newspaper	Nigerian Military	2014
37	Media House	Vanguard	Destroyed copies of the newspaper	Nigerian Military	2014
38	Media House	The Nation	Destroyed copies of the newspaper	Nigerian Military	2014
39	Hir Joseph	Daily Trust	Attacked	Police	2015
40	Emmanuel Elebeke	Daily Vanguard	Beaten and camera seized	DSS	2015
41	Nasir Salisu Zango	Freedom Radio	Threatened	Police	2015
42	Victor Akinkuolie	The Hope Newspaper	Beaten	Police	2015
43	Muhammad Kafin-Dangi	FRCN, Abuja	Attacked	Police	2015

**Table 1:** Documentary data on Impunity Committed against the press during the Administration of President GEJ. Acts of impunity committed by state and local government officials during the administrations of Presidents Jonathan and Buhari were not included in the data. Only impunity committed by federal government officials and security agencies was captured since the study focused on the administrations of Presidents Jonathan and Buhari.

**Sources:** CPJ (2021), SERAP (2019)

**Table 1** shows shades of impunity perpetrated by federal government security agencies or officials during the administration of GEJ. The data also revealed that security agencies (police, DSS, NSCDC, Soldiers, etc.) committed various acts of impunity against the media and media workers during the administrations of President Jonathan and Buhari.

**Table 2: Documentary Data on Impunity Committed against the Press and Journalists during the Administration of President Buhari**

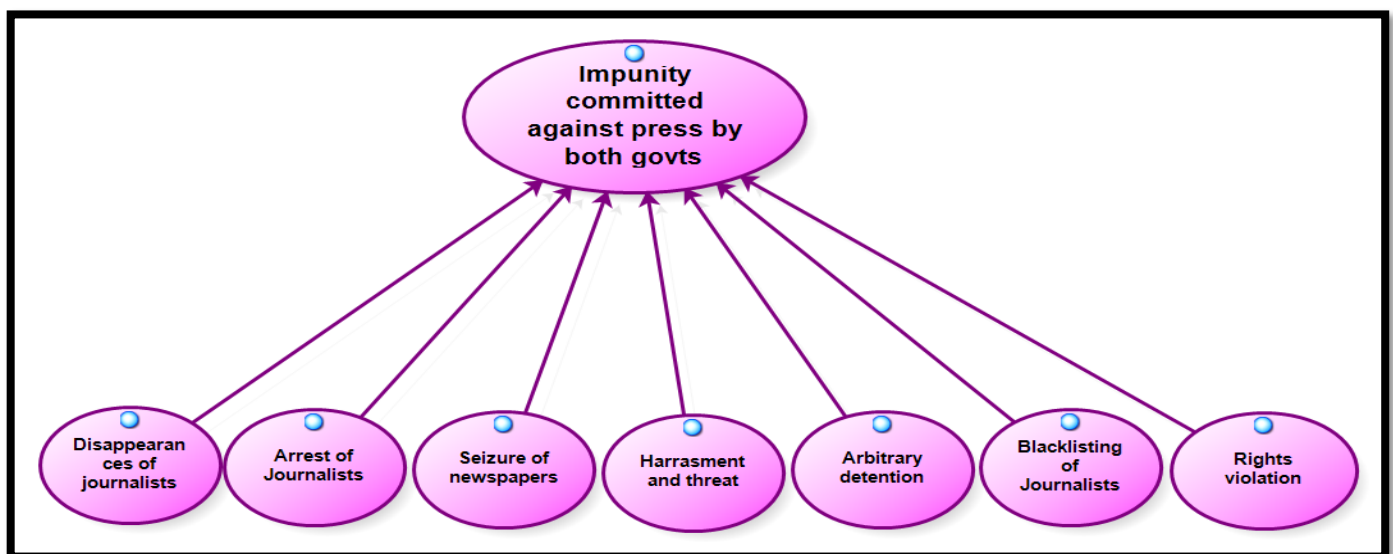
S/N	Name	Media Organisation	Form of Impunity	Aggressor	Year
1.	Ahmad Salkida	Freelancer	Threatened	Nigerian Military	2016

2.	Charles Out	The People's Conscience	Beaten	Police	2017
3.	Media House	The Sun newspaper	Raided	Police of EFCC	2017
4.	Enemaku Ojochigbe	Ray Power FM	Assault and denied access to President Buhari's visit	NSCDC	2018
5.	Taye Adeni	NAN	Assault and denied access to President Buhari's visit	NSCDC	2018
6.	Owoidoho Udofia	Inspiration FM	Beaten	Police	2019
7.	Okodi Okodi	Inspiration FM	Beaten	Police	2019
8.	Musa Mingyi	Blueprint Newspaper	Denied access to cover elections	Military	2019
9.	Hamisu Kabir Matazu	Daily Trust	Denied access to cover elections	Military	2019
10	Shindong Bala	Radio Nigeria	Attacked	Police	2019
11	Amos Tauna	Daily Post	Attacked	Police	2019
12	Stanley Ugochukwu	Arise Tv	Tear-gassed and shot at	DSS	2019
13	Senami Kojah	Sahara Reporters	Tear-gassed/shot	DSS	2019
14	Lucy Elukpo Ateko	The Guardian	Tear-gassed/shot	DSS	2019
15	Oludare Richards	The Guardian	Tear-gassed/shot	DSS	2019
16	Chinedu Asadu	The Cable	Threatened and phone confiscated	Police	2019
17	Lolafunke Ogunlolu	AIT	Threatened	Soldiers	2019
18	Adejumor Kabi	Premium Times	Interrogated	DSS	2019
19	Emmanuel Oladesu	The Nation	Injured by stray bullets	Police	2019
20	Abiodun Yusuf	Ibile Television	Injured by stray bullets	Police	2019
21	Temitope Ogunbanke	New Telegraph	Injured by stray bullets	Police	2019
22	Samson Adenekan	Premium Times	Attacked	Police	2020
23	Offem Nathaniel Ubanga	GeeTV Africa	Attacked	Police	2020
24	Sikiru Obarayese	Daily Post	Assaulted	Police	2020
25	Onifade Emmanuel Pelumi	Gboah TV	Found dead	Police	2020
26	Ebuka Onyeji	Premium Times	Attacked	Police	2020
27	Gimba Kakanda	Daily Trust	Attacked	Police	2020
28	Francis Ogbonna	Arise TV	Attacked	Police	2020
29	Ferdinand Duruoha	Arise TV	Attacked	Police	2020
30	Jonah Udofia	Arise TV	Attacked	Police	2020

31	Joshua Benjamin	Arise TV	Attacked	Police	2020
32	Media House	Nation newspaper	Attacked	Police	2020
33	Ayo Makinde	Channels Tv	Assaulted	Police	2020
34	Akpokona Omafuaire	Vanguard newspaper	Attacked	Police	2020
35	Mathew Omonigho	Daily Post	Beaten and detained	Police	2020
36	Edeki Igafe	NAN	Questioned	Police	2020
37	Christopher Odamah	Delta Trumpet	Questioned	Police	2020
38	Onyekachukwu Meluwa	The Punch	Questioned	Police	2020
39	Francis Sadhere	Business Day newspaper	Questioned	Police	2020
40	Olukayode Jaiyeola	The Punch	Beaten and injured	Police	2020
41	Eniola Daniel	The Guardian	Attacked	Police	2020
42	Sikiru Obarayese	Daily post	Harassed, arrested, and charged	Police	2020

**Table 2** specifies the kinds of impunity committed against the press by overzealous security operatives, politicians, and powerful individuals during the administration of PMB. Acts of impunity committed by states and local government officials during the administrations of Presidents Jonathan and Buhari were not included in the data. Only impunity committed by federal government officials and security agencies was captured since the study focused on the administrations of Presidents Jonathan and Buhari.

### Interview Data on Forms of Impunity Committed against the Press

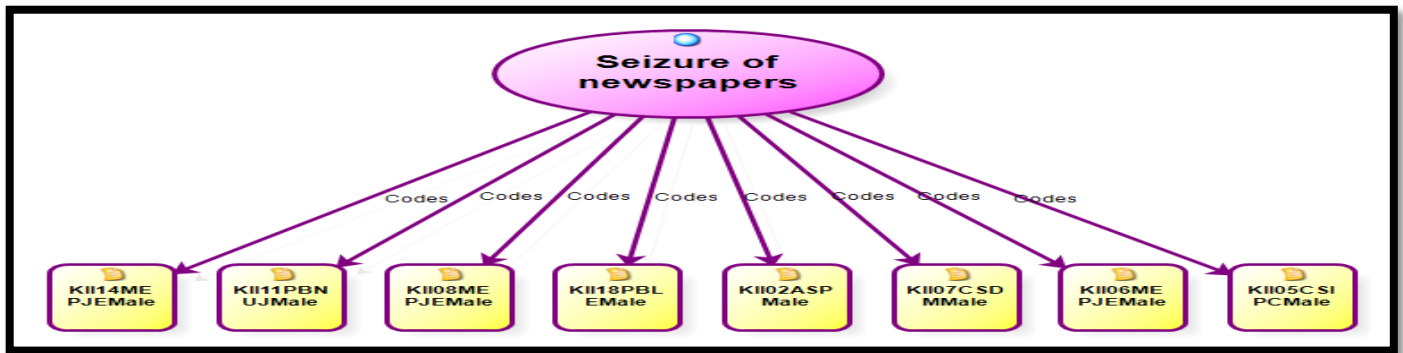


**Figure 1 Forms of Impunity Committed Against the Press during the administrations of Presidents Jonathan and Buhari.**

Figure 1 indicates different shades of impunity committed against the press during the administrations of GEJ and PMB. It also shows that both GEJ and PMB were involved in the following acts of impunity against the press in Nigeria.



**Figure 2 Seizure of Newspapers**



**Figure 2 Seizure of Newspaper**

Figure 2 identifies the Key Informants who spoke on the occurrences of confiscation of newspapers during the administrations of GEJ and PMB.

The seizure of newspapers from different media houses characterised the administrations of Presidents Goodluck Ebele Jonathan and Muhammadu Buhari. Both broadcast and print media suffered arbitrarily from the overzealous security officials. While print media organisations' newsprints and newspapers were seized, their broadcast counterparts were either fined, suspended, or had licenses withdrawn. Informant KII15MEPJEFemale believed that there is no significant difference between GEJ and PMB administrations in terms of leadership style, respect for human rights, protection of journalists, and enforcement of the rule of law:

The administrations of Jonathan and Buhari are the same in terms of issues of freedom for the press because nothing has changed significantly. The same process has been in place, and you should know that institutions that are on the ground in terms of security institutions, the police, the Civil Defense, the DSS, and the military are still the same till now, nothing has changed. So, a change in leadership at the helm of affairs is not necessarily a change in the behavior and the way the security agencies will operate (KII15MEPJEFemale).

Echoing the same thought as captured above, informant KII02ASPMale pointed out that the administrations of Jonathan and Buhari are the same when it comes to freedom of the media and freedom of the press, and the issue of safety and security of journalists. According to him, "it is the same act of impunity. Throughout the tenure of Jonathan, not one act of impunity against the media or journalists was investigated, and the same thing is happening now during PMB. If Buhari is going to stay for the next 10 years, the situation will remain the same" (KII02ASPMale). Informant KII11PBNUJ buttressed this assertion, "During Jonathan we had insurgence against the media, and the war is still ongoing now. Perhaps what is different is that the frontiers of some of these acts of violence" (KII11PBNUJMale).

Some of the informants argued that the security operatives during both administrations were using the security challenges in the country, particularly in flashpoint states in the North, to unleash attacks against the media and journalists. Informants KII05CSIPCMale narrated thus:

The kind of media violations that we had included the seizures of newspapers; newspapers were intercepted and prevented from being circulated. It was at the peak of the battle against Boko Haram, and under the pretense that they were looking for arms and ammunition, newspaper vans that were supposed to be circulating were stopped. The copies of the newspapers were seized. And I could recall that the concerned media, through the newspaper practice, challenged the action in court. So, that was the kind of violation that we had there (KII05CSIPCMale).

Various accounts from the informants indicated that incursion of the media organizations and seizure of newspapers was more pronounced during the administration of GEJ when compared to the PMB

administration. Informant KII11PBNUJ Male recounted “During Jonathan, we have instances when newspapers were seized by the military. So, whether this had the stamp of the President or not, this happened during their administration. So, yes, they do happen, they happened, and they are still happening (KII11PBNUJMale). As informant KII06MEPJEMale narrated:

Remember the seizure of newspapers during the Jonathan era? Very early in the morning, they directed the military to operate on the highway to intercept trucks delivering newspapers and seized all of them. That day, people were looking for newspapers to read but papers were not there, many newspapers incurred losses running into hundreds of millions because it is not just about the newspaper but the adverts therein, as advertisers spend a lot of money to pay for their adverts to come out the next day but all the newspapers were confiscated (KII06MEPJEMale).

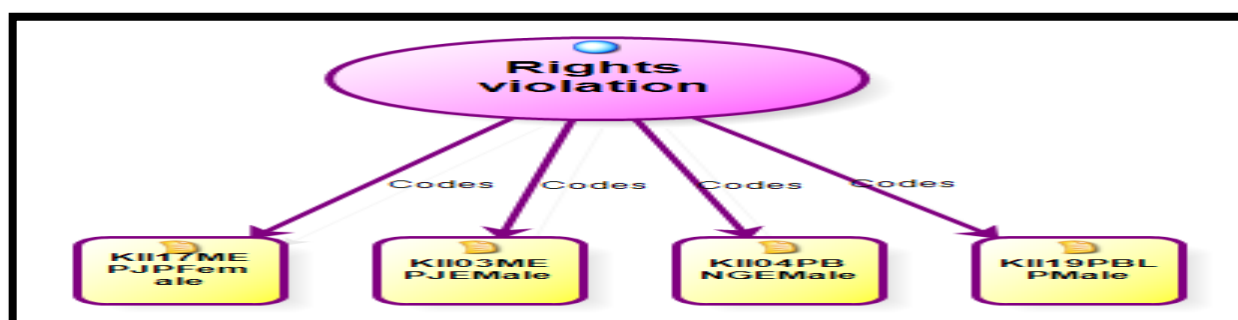
The confiscation of these newspapers led to a lot of loss on the part of the newspaper organisations. This, however made the leadership of the Newspapers Proprietors Association of Nigeria approach the court to seek redress and compensation for their losses, especially when the advertisers had refused to pay their advert rates, claiming that the target readers, consumers, or customers did not have access to the advertisement. Reacting to such a situation is informant KII14MEPJEMale, who disclosed how some of these newspapers were intercepted and seized.

Although, there were attempts under Jonathan which the government, at some point, denied. One of those was when the security officers waylaid the distributors of newspapers of some newspaper organisations like *ThisDay*, *Nigerian Tribune* and *Daily Trust*, which the government denied it. This made the head of the Newspaper Proprietors Association of Nigeria to go to court and struggle with the government. This further made the government give some money to some media houses to seize their newspapers (KII14MEPJEMale).

The GEJ administration, in a deal brokered by the leadership of NPAN compensated affected media organisations for the losses occasioned by DSS officials for delaying the circulation of newspapers and seizure of their vehicles. The Buhari administration that succeeded Jonathan's administration severed the agreement, and the newspaper organizations were forced to return the money on the pretext that the money paid for compensation was budgeted for security purposes as domiciled in the office of the National Security Adviser (NSA). Informant KII07CSDMMale further explained thus:

I think the act was reversed under Buhari, and there was a private agreement that included financial compensation, which was subject to public scrutiny, and that shows indiscretion on the part of the media. The newspapers affected collected the money. Before Buhari came in as president, the money was given to them through the office of the National Security Adviser, but when Buhari came in and shredded that agreement, it forced them to refund the money. People within the media complained that they (the media) were not transparent. They complained, and the public joined in crucifying the media. When the agreement came in, they kept quiet to themselves because they stood to benefit from it, so they turned it into a family affair. Then Buhari forced them to return that money. So, I guess that experience was cogent in the early days of Buhari's administration (KII07CSDMMale).

## Rights Violations



**Figure 3 Rights Violation**

Figure 3 captures the four Key Informants who expressed their opinions on rights violations perpetrated during the administrations of GEJ and PMB.

A number of the informants believed that there was an increase in human rights violations during the administration of PMB when compared to the GEJ administration. As Informant KII03MEPJEMale, who is one of the top national executives of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), rightly said, “During Buhari’s administration, between 2016 and 2020, over 300 cases of violation of rights of journalists were recorded under his watch.” Because the Cybercrime Act passed into law under Jonathan has since been misapplied and misinterpreted to commit these infractions” (KII03MEPJEMale). This Informant explained further, thus, “Yes, it was under Buhari. Although it was passed (Cybercrime Act) under Jonathan. Using that very Act (cyberstalking and bullying), the objective of the Act is to stop internet fraud (dark webbing, identity theft, catfishing). Due to the misinterpretation of the said Act, many states have continuously harassed and attacked journalists (KII03MEPJEMale).

On the contrary, it seems that the GEJ administration had a relatively symbiotic relationship with the media when compared with the PMB administration. Many of the Informants said they were more disposed to a fair working media environment during the GEJ term in office than the hostile atmosphere the media had to contend with during the PMB administration. For instance, KII19PBLPMale said:

It was moderate and fair during the Jonathan administration. Though there were cases of rights infringement during the Jonathan administration, it was not as flagrant as this Buhari administration. Jonathon was more tolerant and accommodating compared to Buhari, and this was evidenced during the widespread ‘Occupy Nigeria’ protest due to the increase in petroleum pump prices. No one was harassed or intimidated. Not even the journalists and the media that gave coverage to the protests, which is within their limit of social responsibility. When you compare it to how the security operatives conducted themselves during the nationwide ENDSARS protest, then you know and see the difference (KII19PBLPMale).

GEJ was found wanting for not obeying court orders and his refusal to grant requests for the release of certain categories of information that are of public interest through the enacted Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). However, the fact that he signed the FOIA into law was considered an abuse of power and a total disrespect to the democratic ethos. “Jonathan did not honor court orders and journalists’ requests for information. However, the administration did not harass journalists or detain them illegally. In my view, the regime had a robust relationship with the media” (KII17MEPJPFemale).

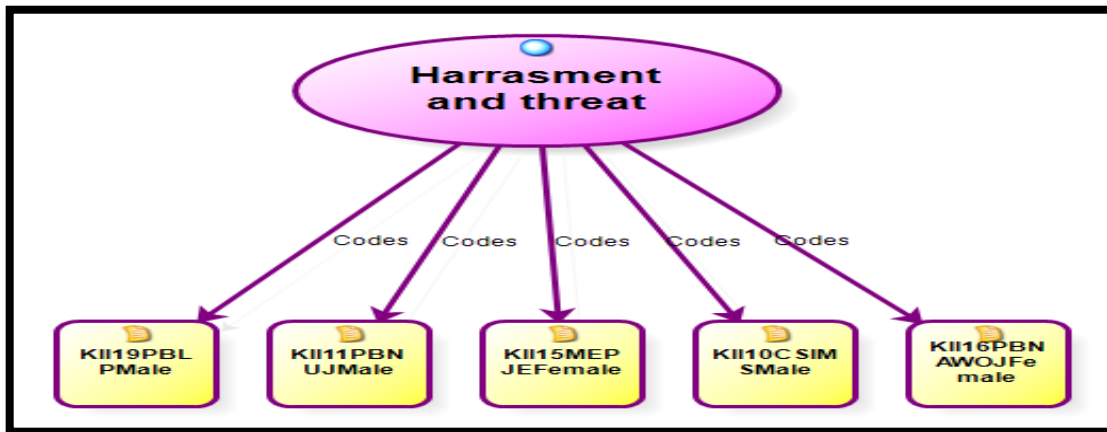
On the question about the administration that violated the rights of journalists and the media, it was discovered, through the Informant, that the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari is a more perceived violator of the rights of journalists. According to informant KII03MEPJEMale, “It is Buhari's administration that has more violations because the number of laws they have tried to enforce and the number of laws that have been enacted hurt the media, more than under Jonathan”. This Informant went further, thus:

So, many journalists have been affected. Harassment is going on. There was a time a Daily Trust journalist was beaten up, his camera broken, because he wanted to take a picture. Journalists have been intimidated if they are in Daily Trust, several examples, the reporter was arrested and the photographer beaten up because of an advertisement (KII03MEPJEMale).

Informant KII05CSIPCMale also buttressed the above submission thus:

The kind of media violations that we had included the seizures of newspapers, newspapers were intercepted and prevented from being circulated. It was at the peak of the battle against Boko Haram, and under the pretense that they were looking for arms and ammunition, newspaper vans that were supposed to be circulating were stopped. The copies of the newspapers were seized. And I could recall that the concerned media, through the newspaper practice, challenged the action in court. So, that was the kind of violation that we had there (KII05CSIPCMale).

## Harassment and Threats



**Figure 4. 4 Harassment and Threats Against Journalists**

Figure 4.4 shows the five Key Informants who spoke on harassment and threats that characterised the administrations of GEJ and PMB.

During both administrations, security agencies weaponized harassment and threats to intimidate and censor the press. Security agencies carried out their duties with impunity, employing different strategies to hound the media. As informant KII10CSIMSMale observed, “When it comes to individual journalists, the sanctions come in the form of harassment, threats, assault, censorship, letter of suspension from duty and unlawful arrest” (KII10CSIMSMale). As far as Informant KII19PBLPMale is concerned, the Buhari administration has repeatedly harassed an online news platform – *Premium Times* and had its publisher and some journalists arrested. Security agencies also invaded *Trust Media* in Abuja. As for the *Premium Times*, the Informant said:

I want to believe that it was the second time the government agents would harass journalists working with *Premium Times*. If I may recollect, on January 19, 2019, police raided *Premium Times*’ head office in Abuja and arrested the newspaper’s publisher, Dapo Olorunyomi, alongside the paper’s judiciary correspondent, Evelyn Okakwu. Plain-clothed officers searched the office shortly after 5 p.m. and said they were acting on a complaint filed by the Chief of Army Staff, General Tukur Buratai (KII16PBNAWOJFemale).

Members of staff and management of *Trust Media*, publishers of *Trust* titles in Abuja, also have had raw deals from the Buhari administration. Informant KII16PBNAWOJFemale narrated how the *Trust Media* office was attacked by the army, thus “January 6, 2019, is a day they would not forget quickly. Earlier that day, some armed soldiers had stormed the Maiduguri office of the newspaper and arrested its regional editor, Uthman Abubakar, and a reporter, Ibrahim Sawab, over a publication the Army Headquarters was uncomfortable with” (KII16PBNAWOJFemale).

In support of Informant KII16PBNAWOJFemale, another Informant said Buhari’s administration carried out more attacks on the media than Jonathan’s administration, thus “during Buhari’s tenure, several journalists were harassed, intimidated, and thrown into detention, most especially during the COVID-19 pandemic and ENDSARS protests. The security operatives used these events as shields to conduct various kinds of rights violations” (KII19PBLPMale).

Blacklisting of journalists means that the State and Federal governments are using their executive powers to restrict, expel or ban journalists from covering state matters. Sometimes, this ban also extends to media organisations. How possible could this barbaric and absolute use of power be going on in a democratic government? The situation was even worse than expected, given the account of Informant KII06MEPJEMale, thus:

Our reporter in Kebbi State was expelled by the state simply because of the threat from the governor. There was a report we did, and the governor was so angry with the report that he then spoke with the Director of the

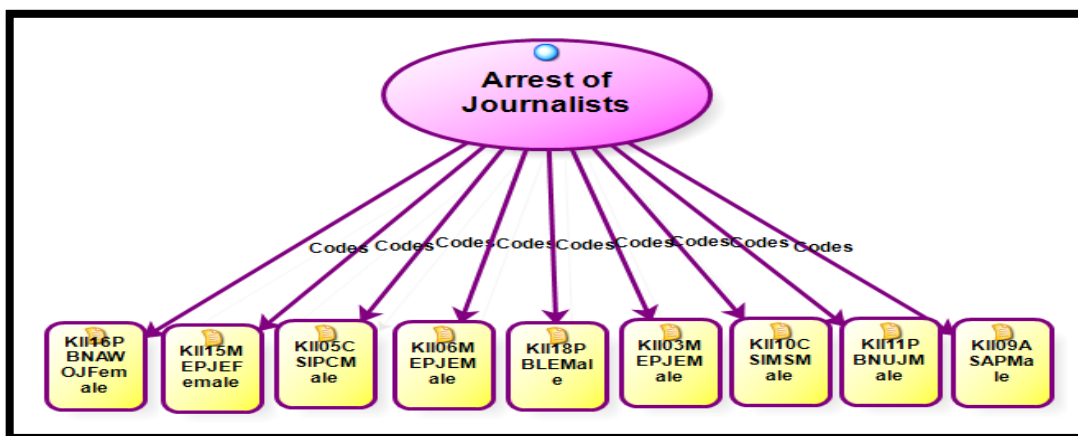


DSS, who in turn invited our reporter to question him. Then he received another call from the police commissioner, and then he went there and was told to retract the story. This was because State Governors have the power to hire and fire and have a monopoly on violence when it comes to tackling journalists who allegedly do something that goes bad with them. So, it is a very bad thing happening in the democracy, which we hope the government will look into and address (KII06MEPJEMale).

Similarly, another Informant is of the opinion that the government is fond of issuing orders and placing a ban on journalists while doing their legitimate journalistic work as enshrined in Section 22 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

So, you can just look at all these, and you begin to see these were the things that were used to gag the media during the military. So, we are having a repeat, they are being re-enacted, and that is what we are having. When we look at the social media bill which civil society has tried to suppress, when you look at it you will see that nobody will be able to do his or her job as a professional journalist if that becomes the law, we are having some of those things, they are coming back, they are coming back and they are coming back. How could you ban journalists from covering state activities? Doing so is tantamount to stifling Nigerians with their right to know (KII08MEPJEMale).

### Arrest of Journalists



### Arrest of Journalists

Figure 5 shows that nine Key Informants noted incidences of arrest of journalists carried out by security operatives during the administrations of GEJ and PMB.

Arrests of this magnitude may have been carried out by security operatives on the order of top military commands, high-ranking security personnel, influential individuals, powerful politicians, the elites, State governors, and or the Presidency. In this regard, journalists and media workers have been indiscriminately arrested during the administrations of GEJ and PMB. As Informant KII09ASAPMale noted:

I also want to put it on record that within the administrations of Goodluck Jonathan and Muhammadu Buhari, we had the highest number of harassment, intimidation, arrests, brutalization, and destruction of journalists in the political history of Nigeria. Yes, during both administrations, because from the available records, not less than 80 journalists have been brutalized, arrested, intimidated, harassed, or to some extent, some even had to pay the supreme price with their lives (KII09ASAPMale).

The style of leadership, administration, and application of the rule of law (which is central to the success of any democracy) is antithetical during GEJ and PMB administration. Informants believed that both administrations were the same, an old wine in a new bottle. Perhaps this is so because the same leaders have been recycling themselves at least since the inception of the Fourth Republic. Hence, Informant KII11PBNUJMale saw no difference between GEJ and PMB administrations as well as their behavior towards the press.



As I told you, they are the same administration, because if I look at it between 1999, when we started practicing this democracy today, the situation has not changed significantly from one administration to the other. They are the same people who have been in governance since 1999 till today. They are the same intolerant politicians, and the same process is ongoing. A governor will simply wake up and feel that a journalist is unduly interfering and continually investigating things. They will complain to the police, and then journalists will be arrested or harassed. It is the same crop of politicians that we have (KII11PBNUJMale).

Specifically, Informants who are practicing journalists continued to recount the ordeal of some of their colleagues on how they have been treated and unduly arrested on the orders of the State and the Federal government officials for publishing stories that they considered ‘offensive’ and ‘embarrassing’ to the governments.

Three of the journalists from *Leadership Newspaper* were arrested.... then there was a radio station in Kaduna that had to be invaded by the Kaduna State military you know they call it AL MISAN, it's a Hausa newspaper. They published a story that has to do with human rights abuses in Potiskum. The story was about the Joint Task Force, these soldiers who were fighting Boko Haram, they were fighting people, disposing of them, beating them up, so that story was published by a Hausa paper, Al Misan, and led to the arrest. They went to the house of the publisher or owner of the paper and ransacked the place, beating up the family members, and that is a sign of impunity (KII03MEPJEMale).

Buttressing the above assertion, Informant KII09ASAPMale said:

There are so many sad cases when journalists have been arrested, news houses have been raided, and there are lots of newsprint destroyed, equipment destroyed, and some journalists have had to pay the supreme price with their lives. I have documented evidence of journalists who have been brutalized, harassed, and intimidated; some were arrested and incarcerated for several years before they were even charged (KII09ASAPMale).

Several journalists, such as Steven Kefas, Agba Jalingo, Jones Abiri, Joe Ogutu, *Premium Times*’ Dapo Oloruyomi, Blessing Okakwu, and Samuel Ogundipe, among others, were arrested and detained for days without being charged in court (KII15MEPJEFemale). The International Centre for Investigative Reporting captured the gory experience of Samuel Ogundipe thus, “I laid on the rough knitted polyester blanket at the benevolence of the cell president inside the police Special Tactical Squad detention center in Abuja, sweating profusely as I read an old copy of a Christian daily guide printed by Paul Enenche’s Dunamis Gospel Centre,” (International Centre for Investigative Reporting, 2019).

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study noted the various shades of impunities that were perpetrated against the press during the administrations of Presidents Jonathan and Buhari. Figures compiled through secondary sources revealed that the number of impunities during the administrations of Presidents Jonathan and Buhari was almost at par; 43 cases were recorded during GEJ, while 42 cases occurred during PMB. All the 43 cases recorded under GEJ were committed by government security agencies or officials. Similarly, 42 cases of acts of impunity were also carried out by the same federal government security agencies under Buhari.

Similarly, violations of the fundamental rights of journalists increased. These rights violations include unlawful and arbitrary killings; disappearances of non-state actors; torture by federal government security officials, and protracted arbitrary detention. Others include life-threatening conditions, civilian detentions in military facilities, infractions on citizens’ privacy rights, criminal libel, and intrusion of the rights to peaceful assembly and freedom of association. These acts of violation were more pronounced under President Buhari’s administration. This finding corresponds with the Media Fellow for West Africa (MFWA) report that not least 300 violations affecting about 500 journalists, media workers, and media houses were recorded in Nigeria during President Buhari (MFWA Report, 2021).

Earlier, on July 30, 2014, Garba Shehu published an article in *Premium Times* newspaper, titled “Press Freedom and Security,” where he detailed several journalists who had been killed in the course of their duty. In

the article, particular attention was focused on journalists who were killed during the administration of GEJ. Garba wrote:

On 1 July 2014, yet another casualty of the press was reported as Thomas Thomas, editor of the Global Concord Newspaper, was handcuffed and thrown into a car by armed men in Uyo. Unyime Ekwere, chairman of the Global Concord's editorial board, told CPJ that Thomas was being detained by the State Security Service in what is suspected to be retaliation for the publication's recent criticism of alleged plans by the Akwa Ibom state government to assassinate traditional chiefs ahead of the 2015 general elections. During the past six weeks, The Nation, the Daily Trust, and Leadership newspapers have reported infractions, in which military personnel have confiscated or blocked the distribution of newspapers reportedly containing stories negative to the regime or military operations related to security in the country (Garba, 2014).

Garba (2014) noted that "members of the media are frequently arrested, detained, and questioned without trial". The media environment was not palatable for journalists to work in. Due to these threats, coverage of government activities declined. As Garba wrote, "We are failing our brothers and sisters in the media and failing Nigeria in its plight towards just democratic governance". Nothing seems more worrisome to Garba than the degree of anti-democratic measures against the media and journalists under the GEJ administration:

The unfair and unjust treatment of the Nigerian media impedes the growth of our democracy. To use money, coercion, threats, and violence to sway the media is to abandon the principles of democracy. Without freedom of speech and expression, we regress to authoritarian rule because journalists are forced to practice self-censorship to protect themselves from threats of violence and detention. The members of the press are a vehicle for the dissemination of information and transparency, and their work is a crucial part of our democratic society (Garba, 2014).

## CONCLUSION

The International Conventions and Treaties, which Nigeria is a signatory to, give the media and journalists roles to perform. Similarly, Section 22 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) also gives power to the media to hold the government accountable to the people. In this case, governments always feel that the media is emboldened and needs to be restricted through toxic legislation. This confirmed one of the postulations of developmental media theory as advanced by McQuail that media in developing countries like Nigeria (emphasis mine) "tend to exist in the interest of development, the state has a right to intervene in, or restrict, media operations and devises of censorship, subsidy, and direct control can be justified" (McQuail, 1983, p. 90). The result of this study similarly relates to the findings of Pate and Dauda, (2020), Olukotun, (2016), and Ogbondah, (2016) that arbitrary detentions of journalists and media workers during the military regimes and the post-military era in Nigeria's Fourth Republic posit threats to freedom of the press and expression.

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