

MEDIA CENSORSHIP IN DEMOCRATIC NIGERIA DURING PRESIDENT MOHAMMADU BUHARI'S ADMINISTRATION (2015-2023)

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Abstract

Media censorship in Nigeria has progressed from the colonial period, through the military regimes, to democratic dispensation, with successive administrations using legal and institutional measures to control press freedom. This study examined media censorship under President Muhammadu Buhari's administration (2015–2023), focusing on the censorship measures in place during Buhari's tenure. Grounded in democratic participant theory, the study adopted a qualitative research approach, analysing secondary data from academic sources, government reports, and media watchdogs. Findings revealed that while the government cited national security and misinformation control, the pressure of censorship, such as the 2021 *Twitter* ban, the *Cybercrime Act*, *NBC* sanctions, and the harassment of journalists and media houses, undermined press freedom, limited access to information, and fuelled self-censorship. Cases of arrests, suspensions and digital restrictions paralysed the opposition voices. However, journalists, civil society, and international watchdogs' resistance pushed back against these measures. The study concluded that Buhari's administration was one of the most restrictive in terms of press freedom in Nigeria through the use of legal, economic and digital control mechanisms. Nonetheless, civil resistance prevented total suppression. Thus, it is recommended that legal reforms take place, particularly a review of the *Cybercrime Act* and *NBC Code*, ensuring judicial protection of journalists and reinforcing advocacy for press freedom, such that regulations are in line with democratic principles and values.

Keywords: Media Censorship, Buhari Administration, Press Freedom, Digital Rights, Cybercrime Act, *Twitter* Ban

Introduction

Censorship is used officially to control and suppress any expression that can potentially threaten the order of the state (Smith, 2020). Historically, monitoring of public morals, control of public awareness, and silencing of opposition were the purposes of censorship (Abbasi & Sharqi, 2015). The evolution of media censorship in Nigeria is a reflection of the country's political and historical circumstances. In Nigeria, as a multicultural and multi-ethnic nation, the mass media plays a pivotal role in shaping public opinion, ensuring transparency and enhancing democratic governance (Ahmed, 2019). However, these duties have often caused the media to clash with succeeding governments, especially when they expose corruption, inconsistencies, or human rights violations (Ojebode, 2019).

Nigeria's history of media censorship dates back to the British colonial era, when stringent press regulations were implemented by the government to suppress nationalist movements and manage public opinion (Ibrahim and Adedayo, 2019). The *Newspaper Ordinance of 1903* was one of the regulatory tools used by authorities to restrict opposing publications and mandate that newspapers register with the government (Oso, 2017). Nigeria maintained colonial-era censorship laws after gaining independence in 1960, modifying them to fit the needs of succeeding administrations (Ajibade, 2021).

The most severe suppression of press freedom occurred during the military regimes of the 1970s and 1980s. Military leaders, especially Generals Sani Abacha and Ibrahim Babangida, enacted legislation that made criticising the government illegal and forced media houses to shut down (Okonkwo, 2020). During General Muhammadu Buhari's first administration, *Decree No. 4 of 1984* made it unlawful for journalists to publish any information that the government deemed "false," even if

it was factually accurate (Gadzama, 2022). Media workers who opposed the government were routinely detained, harassed, or sent into exile (Uche, 2021).

The 1999 return to democracy raised hopes for more freedom of the press. Nonetheless, under the pretext of maintaining public order and national security, the Nigerian government persisted in regulating the media (Agbese, 2018). New worries were sparked by the *Cybercrimes Act of 2015* since its provisions might be used to stifle online dissent and digital media (Okoro and Odoemelam, 2020). Particularly during Buhari's civilian government (2015–2023), which was heavily criticised for stifling digital activism and limiting online spaces, social media platforms turned into battlefields for free speech (Freedom House, 2022).

There are still discrepancies in the way press freedom is implemented in Nigeria, despite the country's adherence to international conventions like the *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights* and the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2023).

Statement of the Problem

Even after Nigeria returned to democracy, worries about media control have remained, especially during President Muhammadu Buhari's (2015–2023) government. Government acts during this time, such as the 2021 suspension of *Twitter*, drew harsh national and international condemnation and prompted concerns about the state's dedication to democratic principles (Freedom House, 2022). Fundamental rights to freedom of expression and access to information have frequently collided with the rationale for such censorship, which is based on public order, national security, and the battle against disinformation (Okonkwo, 2021).

Nigeria's constitutional provisions for press freedom appear to be at odds with the government's increasingly stringent media regulations, which is a significant issue. These conflicts are made more complex by Nigeria's responsibilities under international human rights treaties such as the *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights* and the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, which the government is alleged to regularly breach through its censorship policies (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2023).

Relatively few studies exist to analyse how media regulations implemented by Buhari affected press autonomy, together with democratic engagement and public conversation. International observers, civil society organisations, and journalists' responses have brought attention to the rising concern that media censorship might erode civic engagement and public accountability, two essential elements of a healthy democracy (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Studies on the impact of censorship on media operations and democratic developments during the Buhari's administration are relatively few.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to:

1. Explore the historical development of media censorship in Nigeria and its effects on press freedom.
2. Examine the Buhari administration's involvement in the formulation and enforcement of media censorship policies.

Conceptual Review

Censorship

There has been much discussion about censorship in a variety of political systems and societies. It entails the repression or control of speech, public communication, or other types of expression that a governing body, organisation, or private entity deems offensive, damaging, or sensitive (Fiesler, 2018). Some contend that censorship violates fundamental liberties like the right to free speech and information access, while others see it as essential for upholding social order and ensuring national security (Glanville, 2019). The idea of censorship is examined in this essay, along with its types, historical context, pro and con arguments, ramifications for modern society, and applicability to Nigeria.

Censorship has been around since ancient times. According to Plato (399 BCE), Socrates was condemned to death in ancient Greece for allegedly indoctrinating young people with his beliefs. Books and speeches that were considered subversive were also suppressed by the Roman Empire. During the Middle Ages, the Catholic Church was also a major player in censorship, outlawing books that went

against religious beliefs (Jones, 2001). Governments and religious organisations imposed restrictions on publications that threatened their authority after the printing press was invented in the 15th century, intensifying efforts to control information. Nowadays, censorship has expanded to include limitations on social media, digital content, and mass media.

Types of Censorship

According to Fiesler (2018), censorship manifests in various forms, including political, religious, moral, and corporate censorship.

1. Political Censorship: To preserve power and social order, governments frequently repress opposing viewpoints. Access to international media and freedom of speech are limited by censorship laws in authoritarian countries like China and North Korea.
2. Religious Censorship: This entails the restriction from publishing and reporting certain religious beliefs in various countries. To ban statements that offend religious beliefs, some Islamic nations implement criminal sanctions.
3. Moral Censorship: This is the control of content adjudged offensive or obscene, such as hate speech, violent and sexually explicit content. It is noteworthy that what is considered morally unacceptable vary by country across the globe.
4. Corporate Censorship: This entails the use of social platforms such as *Facebook* and *Twitter* with other social media networks by companies for content management as corporate overseers, by implementing rules to manage hate speech and false information which is subject to bias and restriction of free speech.

Censorship in Nigeria

Ojebode (2020) reveals that censorship has taken many forms in Nigeria, especially in the digital, media, and political spheres. Authorities have attempted to control information flow, specifically when such information criticises government operations. The Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (NBC) often uses its control to sanction media outlets that broadcast views that challenge government policies or dissent (Ojebode, 2020). Furthermore, because they give the government extensive authority to censor online speech, the *Cybercrime Act of 2015* and the proposed Social Media Bill have sparked worries about digital censorship. Exposure of corruption or government criticism by Nigerian journalists and activists leads to a pattern of harassment followed by detention and intimidation. The attempt to silence online speech about police brutality during the 2020 #EndSARS protests is a clear example of censorship (Ibekwe, 2021).

Additionally, the government's willingness to restrict digital expression when it is thought to pose a threat to political stability was shown by the 2021 *Twitter* ban, which lasted for several months. Moral and religious forms of censorship are widespread throughout Nigerian society. Artistic expressions in Nigeria must conform to religious and cultural norms since the country features numerous religious groups, resulting in censorship against unconventional artistic expressions. In northern Nigeria's traditionalist regions, social norms dictate that the distribution of music and films, as well as books, exists under severe limitations (Adamu, 2019).

Censorship in the Digital Age

The emergence of the internet and subsequently social media has made censorship a more complicated problem. Authorities, together with businesses, have implemented content restrictions because they fear false information and cyber threats, as well as online harassment. These initiatives lead to concerns about declining democratic values, together with the rise of digital authoritarian rule (Zuboff, 2019). The ongoing debate over digital censorship is highlighted by examples like Russia's media restrictions, China's Great Firewall, and the controversy surrounding content moderation by major social media platforms. The Nigerian people face alarming threats to their speech rights and information access because governments strengthen their power over online platforms.

The practice of censorship remains controversial because it requires weighing off between basic free speech rights and regulations for public protection. Public morals remain safe while hate speech is stopped along with national security, so do these measures but they endanger political freedom along with prejudice and censorship of ideas. Within digital media, alongside political domains, Nigeria

makes use of censorship both for defence needs and to initiate repression. Societies need to manage censorship developments in digital communication that protect democratic principles alongside human rights.

Theoretical Framework

Democratic Participant Theory

Denis McQuail, who served as both a media theorist and communication expert, formulated the Democratic Participant Theory during the 1980s. McQuail developed this theory because previous media theories showed weakness, especially in libertarian and social responsibility approaches (McQuail, 1987). The views of marginalised groups and local communities were not taken into consideration by these earlier ideas, which primarily assumed the dominance of commercial or state-run media, notwithstanding their support for press freedom and public accountability.

According to McQuail (1987), the media should allow entire communities, especially marginalised weaker groups, to join the communication process together with serving the public interest in theory. The model relied on the principle that democracy needs inclusive dialogue at all social stages beyond elections and top-down information dissemination.

In the democratic governance of President Muhammadu Buhari in Nigeria, Democratic Participant Theory holds extreme importance. During this time, the Nigerian government conducted numerous media restriction practices which were contrary to the principles of democratic engagement (Al Jazeera, 2021). The Nigerian ban on *Twitter* in 2021 serves as a prime illustration (Premium Times, 2021). The federal government's shutdown of *Twitter* eliminated a core space where youth activists, including #EndSARS participants, conducted their dissent activities through protests (BBC News, 2020). The ban's impact eliminated much of the population's ability to communicate unless the rule violated the assumption that people should always retain communication channels.

Furthermore, journalists and media outlets were threatened by the *Cybercrime Act* and the updated *NBC Code*, which limited coverage of opposing viewpoints and discouraged critical reporting (NBC, 2020). Independent media outlets received coercion alongside penalties or complete shutdowns, but state broadcasters faced accusations of biased reporting instead.

Empirical Review

President Muhammadu Buhari's administration implemented restrictive laws to control the press and restrict free speech, which was one of the most important aspects of media censorship. Akinwale (2021) evaluated the proposed Hate Speech Bill (2019) and Social Media Bill (2019) legislation to determine their functions for outlawing particular types of information sharing. The harsh penalties outlined in these bills included imprisonment and fines of up to ₦10 million for those found guilty of disseminating "hateful" or "false" information. The critics argued that these laws existed to minimise government opposition while restricting online activism. The research revealed how these bills provoked public and civil society resistance, yet displayed governmental internet regulation plans because many journalists, together with activists, feared a widespread self-censorship effect where reporters would avoid sensitive stories to prevent government backlash.

The Buhari administration was characterised by a significant amount of detention and threat of reporters, with law enforcement agencies being used to curtail press freedom; Ojo (2020) carried out a research on the number and type of journalist charges in Nigeria between 2015 and 2021, recognising over 50 cases where journalists were detained for their reporting, including the arrest of Agba Jalingo, a journalist detained for more than four months for publishing a report on claimed government fraud; and the numerous arrests of investigative journalist Omoyele Sowore for his activism and media publications. The research indicates that these measures stifled professional journalism and caused journalists to become more cautious when reporting.

Olowolagba (2022) examined the various fines and sanctions that the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (NBC) imposed on major media outlets, finding that in 2020 alone, the NBC fined *Channels TV*, *AIT*, and *Arise TV* ₦3 million each for allegedly using "unverified social media sources" in their coverage of the #EndSARS protests. The study also noted that the NBC's regulatory measures became stricter under Buhari's administration, and that although NBC defended these penalties as part of its responsibility to safeguard media competence, scholars saw them as a way to silence

disagreement. NBC used discriminatory enforcement practices against media platforms that displayed anti-government sentiments without taking action against media acting in support of the government.

Okoro (2022) examined the 2021 Nigerian *Twitter* ban and its effects on digital rights and freedom of expression following the removal of a tweet by President Buhari that was considered to incite violence. The Nigerian authorities imposed the *Twitter* ban as a national security measure, yet Okoro confirmed that the ban caused substantial financial problems for local businesses that relied on *Twitter* for advertisement and cut off social activists' main organising platform. Many Nigerians used Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) to bypass the regulatory ban on social media platforms, which demonstrated their strong objection to online censorship.

Adebayo (2021) looked into the relationship between journalists' self-censorship and media censorship. Research involving interviews with 50 journalists at Nigerian major media establishments revealed that 70% of respondents skipped sensitive topics because they feared both arrest and potential shutdown of their media outlet, specifically regarding security and government corruption problems. The research examined cases of government censorship that led to the elimination of corruption investigations, particularly those showing financial mismanagement at the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC). Based on his research, Adebayo determined that censorship structures restricted the media's ability to monitor political affairs, which made essential information unavailable to the public.

Eze (2021) conducted a government response analysis on the media coverage of protests, particularly the 2020 #EndSARS demonstrations which marked a turning point for media censorship in Nigeria. The study revealed that the government employed media control strategies, to suppress youth-based movements and halt mass demonstrations against brutality by law enforcement officials. These reflected in Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC)'s sanction, which compelled the harassment of media organisations, to suppress news reporting. Also, social media content that covered the protests were deleted after the directives enacted by government authorities.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research approach was adopted for this study, using document analysis, which involved a thorough review, interpretation and evaluation of existing literature, online materials, and library resources. Secondary sources which include books, journal articles, and scholarly papers from databases like Google Scholar and JSTOR were the key academic sources used to explore media censorship in Nigeria, alongside relevant materials sourced from institutional libraries, to unearth and comprehend mass media censorship implementation and implications, during Buhari's Administration. The data generated from the secondary sources were thematically analysed, to identify patterns, narratives and themes systematically.

Historical Context of Mass Media Censorship in Nigeria

The political history of Nigeria, from colonial times till date shapes its media censorship, this reflects in the clash between the media's nation-building role and the efforts to control information flow by the government. The Nigerian media has experienced periods of extreme censorship, especially during the military regimes. Laws and diverse strategies were employed by the government to suppress media freedom.

Colonial Era: The Beginnings of Media Control

During British colonial rule, the Nigerian media were severely restricted and controlled, to serve the interests of the colonial government. Although the press was vital to the spread of information, its ability to critique the colonial government was severely limited. Any attempt to oppose the government was harshly suppressed, and newspapers were supposed to advance the colonial agenda. The *Public Order Act of 1923*, which gave the British colonial government the authority to outlaw publications judged subversive or detrimental to the colonial order, was one of the first significant laws limiting the press (Akinfeleye, 2014).

In 1951, the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) was also founded by the colonial government to oversee radio transmissions within the nation. The corporation was completely governed by the government, which made sure it operated in accordance with colonial interests. The colonial

government used media censorship to preserve political stability and quell nationalist movements, although some early Nigerian newspapers, like the *Nigerian Daily Times* and the *West African Pilot*, started to question the status quo (Omu, 1978).

Post-Independence: Media Freedom and Repression

There was a brief period of media freedom following Nigeria's 1960 independence. But the ensuing political unrest, which included several military takeovers, resulted in a rise in press censorship. The Nigerian press was split between pro-government and anti-government groups in the early years of independence. Media outlets and politicians and military leaders often clashed during this time, especially on issues like ethnicity, governance, and corruption (Dare, 2001).

Decree No. 4 of 1984, passed by the military government of General Muhammadu Buhari, was one of the most important censorship laws; it made it illegal for journalists to publish anything that could be interpreted as detrimental to national security or the government's interests. Several journalists were arrested and imprisoned, and publications were fined or shut down for publishing materials deemed offensive to the state. The military coup of 1966 signalled the start of a more oppressive era for the media. Under military regimes, Omotola (2006) noted that journalists faced strict censorship, with government officials using state power to control the narrative and silence critical voices.

The Military Era: Intensification of Censorship

During the military dictatorship of Generals Buhari, Babangida, and Abacha, which ruled Nigeria from 1984 to 1999, the country experienced the worst media censorship in its history. One strategy used by the military regimes to suppress dissent, control public opinion, and silence political opposition was censorship. According to Akinfeleye (2009), the government was granted the power to arrest and detain journalists who published anti-regime materials by General Sani Abacha's *Decree No. 2 of 1994*. Abacha's government's notorious use of violence and intimidation against journalists caused many of them to leave the country or go into exile.

The primarily infamous example of media restrictions during this time was the closure of *The News*, *The Tell*, and the *Guardian* newspapers, all of which were perceived as crucial of the military government; the government also banned foreign media outlets perceived as anti-regime from operating (Fafowora, 2001); journalists were often physically attacked, harassed, and imprisoned for simply performing their duties.

Transition to Civilian Rule: Challenges and Progress

When Nigeria moved to civilian rule in 1999, the media landscape completely changed. In an attempt to regain press freedom, the administration of President Olusegun Obasanjo, who was elected under the new democratic regime, repealed some of the toughest censorship laws from the military era. However, issues continued despite the media landscape becoming more transparent and active.

The *Freedom of Information (FOI) Act* was passed in 2011 as a significant step towards accountability and openness, allowing reporters and citizens to obtain details held by the government. Nonetheless, the Nigerian government persisted in limiting media freedom through several tactics, particularly concerning national security, political unrest, and corruption scandals. For example, in order to avoid anxiety and safeguard national security, the government restricted coverage of particular parts of the conflict during the Boko Haram insurgency, which led to a rise in media censorship (Ojebode, 2015).

The government of Nigeria currently focuses on digital censorship through social media regulation to minimise online media's impact on citizens. The Nigerian government banned *Twitter* in 2021 because President Muhammadu Buhari's inflammatory tweet was deleted from the platform. Many international and domestic critics maintained that free speech rights were threatened when *Twitter* remained banned for over seven months. The Nigerian government imposed *Twitter's* ban based on two factors: its spreading of misinformation and its support for secession movements (Oluwaseun, 2021).

The Nigerian government has persisted in enforcing laws intended to regulate online media even after the *Twitter* ban was lifted. Proposed legislation, such as the Social Media Bill, has sparked discussions about the extent of governmental control over digital spaces and the potential for further censorship. These laws could be used to suppress dissent and jeopardise the work of journalists and

activists who use social media to expose government wrongdoing and hold those in authority accountable (Ekeh, 2021).

Nigeria's political conflicts, military rule, and efforts to regulate the flow of information have all influenced the historical background of media censorship in that nation. According to Akinwale (2021), Nigeria has experienced both successes and failures in the area of press freedom from the colonial era to the present. Even though the Freedom of Information Act and the return to democracy in 1999 represented important advancements in media transparency, obstacles still exist, especially in light of digital censorship, political repression, and national security concerns. Amali et al. (2022) pointed out that the Nigerian government must strike a balance between safeguarding the freedom of expression guaranteed by the Constitution and maintaining national security as the media landscape changes.

Technology breakthroughs and the liberalisation of the communication industry helped Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999, ushering in a new era of media proliferation and relative freedom. Section 22 of the 1999 Constitution, which requires the press to hold the government liable, essentially established a framework for press freedom under democratic governance (Amadi, 2011). But as Ufuoma and Tunde (2019) claim, the state-media relationship remained tense because successive governments kept seeing the press as a possible danger to political stability.

Ojebode and Adegbola (2013) assert that the democratic era facilitated a more dynamic and varied media environment, marked by the emergence of private broadcasters and digital platforms. However, the continued application of defamation laws, regulatory scrutiny, and security rationales frequently fostered a climate of self-censorship. The central motive behind these actions was the state's intent to regulate narratives and influence public perception, frequently undermining media autonomy (Sampson, 2014).

The state-media relationship has grown more tense since security matters have intensified. Regarding actions to limit media operations, Yusha'u (2015) emphasised government periodic restrictions for national stability purposes, especially in conflict areas. These actions, which governments use to defend national security, commonly cause dilemmas about threatened freedom of speech and potential misuse of power. Ufuoma and Tunde (2019) demonstrate how digital media changes the way the government interacts with the media field. The state implemented new proposed online legislation to curb negative speech and deception, but critics believe the laws might suppress political opposition while restricting speech freedom (Sampson, 2014).

Adeeko (2023) explains that the democratic transition in Nigeria created a more open media environment, yet different challenges persist in how the state relates to the media. The state's efforts to regulate public opinion and regulate narratives frequently conflict with the media's role in ensuring openness and accountability. This ongoing dispute emphasises how important it is to carefully balance upholding press freedom with safeguarding national interests.

Buhari's Administration and Mass Media Censorship (2015-2023)

Despite the democratic structure of Buhari's administration, stringent coercive measures alongside technological and legal controls to manage media operations were implemented. According to Mohammed and Olayiwola (2021), authoritarian policies and practices were adopted by the administration, under the guise of democratic legitimacy. These include:

Legal Instruments and Policies

Existing laws and new regulations were implemented to control media movements across the country. A powerful tool for the prosecution of journalists and critics is the *Cybercrime Act of 2015*, passed before Buhari's administration, which illegalises the circulation of inaccurate information and participation in cyberstalking. These two practices were used arbitrarily to silence critics often. Journalists and activists received charges from the law according to Amnesty International (2020) due to their function as a political repression instrument.

In a bid to intensify media control, controversial adjustments of two existing media laws, the *Nigerian Press Council Act* and the *National Broadcasting Commission Act* was proposed by the administration. Ezeibe and Ibe (2022) contend that under the guise of preventing misinformation and maintaining national security, by enhancing penalties for violations and granting regulatory agencies more power to penalise violators of its regulations, media independence is undermined.

Technological Surveillance and Digital Censorship

The rise of digital media presented new challenges for Nigerian media censorship. *Facebook*, *WhatsApp* and *Twitter* have established themselves as powerful tools for political activism because they avoid traditional media screening procedures. The Buhari administration, imposed regulations after understanding how strong these online platforms had become. A notable example is the 2021 *Twitter* ban that followed the removal of the president's controversial tweet. The government justified the ban by citing *Twitter's* alleged role in disseminating misleading information and threatening Nigerian sovereignty (Akinola, 2021).

In addition, the Protection from Internet Falsehood and Manipulation Bill was introduced, indicating a legislative attempt to formalise digital censorship. According to Okon and Udoh (2023), proponents of the bill asserted that it was designed to combat fake news, while detractors viewed it as a means of suppressing dissent and restricting online freedoms.

Arrests, Harassment, and Intimidation of Journalists

During the Buhari administration, another significant aspect of media censorship was the frequent arrests, threats, and harassment of journalists. Different bloggers, including journalists and social media influencers, encountered persecution due to their critical coverage of the government. Government officials demonstrated their reluctance to accept criticism when they arrested Agba Jalingo in 2019 for exposing corruption among the Cross River State governor while also detaining Sahara Reporters' publisher, Omoyele Sowore, in 2020 (Sahara Reporters, 2020). Under the pretence of national security, the Department of State Service (DSS) and the Nigerian Police Force regularly took charge of suppressing media figures via threats and intimidation. According to Reporters Without Borders (2022), the rise in unlawful detentions and the violent repression of journalists made Nigeria's press freedom rating fall sharply under Buhari's rule.

Mass media censorship in Nigeria, particularly the Buhari administration's approach, highlights the complex interrelationships among governance, media freedom, and societal dynamics. The continuous authoritarian tendencies despite the protection of press freedom by democratic frameworks theoretically, reflect significant systemic problems. In order to ensure an independent media environment, strong institutional measures, enhanced media literacy education and extensive legal framework changes are crucial.

Conclusion

Mass media censorship in Nigeria, particularly during President Muhammadu Buhari's administration (2015–2023), reflects the continuous conflict between authorities and press freedom. A variety of regulatory measures, such as legal constraints, monetary penalties, suspensions, among others was utilised to silence opposition views and opinions, especially on the internet. Although, national security, control of misinformation, and societal stability serve as justification for increased authority over the media, these actions counter the ideals of democracy and the constitutional right to freedom of expression. Journalists, media organisations, and civil society groups resist censorship through international campaigns, lawsuits, and investigative journalism. It is noteworthy that other social media platforms still allowed uncontrolled speech despite the intensified censorship, like the 2021 *Twitter* ban.

Recommendations

This study recommends that:

1. Repressive laws such as the *Cybercrime Act* and the *NBC Code*, which undermine press freedom should be critically review, restructured and amended to comply with international human rights standards. This would ensure that journalists and media in general are safeguarded from arbitrary censorship and state control.
2. The judiciary must actively uphold press freedom by ensuring that cases involving journalists and media organisations are adjudicated impartially, swiftly, and transparently. Courts should also take a firm stance against the weaponisation of legal processes to harass, silence, or intimidate members of the press.
3. Civil society and media advocacy groups must intensify efforts to educate citizens about their constitutional right to free expression. Through sustained public awareness campaigns, these

organisations should empower Nigerians to demand accountability, resist undue censorship, and defend democratic values in the face of state overreach.

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