

## Media Ethics and National Security: Balancing Freedom of Expression in Nigeria

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### Abstract

*In democratic societies, the relationship between national security and media ethics poses a difficult conundrum, especially in weaker nations like Nigeria where press freedom and security issues frequently clash. How media professionals balance the moral need to inform the public while reducing any risks to national security is examined in this paper. The paper explores the conflicts between defending freedom of expression, a fundamental component of democratic governance, and attending to the demands of national security in the face of terrorism, insurgency, and political instability. It does this by drawing on normative theories of the press and the ethical principles of responsibility, truth, and public interest. It acknowledges situations in which restrictive security measures weakened democratic accountability and restricted press freedom, while simultaneously highlighting instances in which dramatic reporting, disinformation, or unsubstantiated news made insecurity worse. This paper has as its theoretical framework within the context of social responsibility and the framing theories. It was argued that the Boko Haram insurgency serves as a prime example of how media coverage can shape public understanding and government response to security threats. Thus, the role of media in national security is multifaceted, serving as a key player in shaping narratives surrounding security threats. Historical contexts illustrate the evolving role of media in national security debates and policies, notably through coverage of groups like Boko Haram. The paper concludes that ethical journalism is paramount in navigating the complex terrain of national security in Nigeria. As journalists strive to balance freedom of expression with security concerns, the role of media organizations, regulatory bodies, and civil society will be crucial in fostering an environment where ethical standards are upheld.*

### Keywords

Ethics, Expression, Freedom, Media and National Security



## I. Introduction

Security, as a concept, refers to the state of being free from danger or threat, encompassing a wide range of aspects such as physical safety, economic stability, and political sovereignty (Buzan, 1991). It is fundamentally about the preservation of life, property, and the overall well-being of individuals and societies. In contemporary discussions, security has evolved to encompass both traditional and non-traditional threats, including terrorism, cybercrime, and environmental crises, making it a multifaceted concern in global governance (Idris & Msughter, 2022). At the core of security discourse is the notion of *national security*, which refers to a state's ability to protect its sovereignty,

citizens, and resources from both internal and external threats. National security, according to Roland Paris (2001), is more than just military defense; it includes political, economic, environmental, and societal dimensions. In the 21st century, this concept has expanded beyond territorial integrity to include human security, emphasizing the protection of individuals from systemic threats

such as poverty, disease, and human rights abuses (United Nations Development Programme, 1994).

From a global perspective, national security policies are largely shaped by international relations theories, such as realism and liberalism. Realists emphasize the role of power and state-centric security mechanisms, often advocating for strong military capabilities as the primary means of ensuring national security (Waltz, 1979). On the other hand, liberal perspectives highlight the importance of international cooperation, institutions, and diplomacy in addressing security challenges (Keohane & Nye, 1977). These global frameworks influence national policies, as states must navigate complex international dynamics while securing their domestic interests.

In Nigeria, national security has historically been viewed through the lens of territorial defense, primarily focusing on external threats (Msughter et al., 2023). However, in recent decades, the rise of internal security challenges such as terrorism, banditry, and separatist movements has shifted the focus toward addressing domestic vulnerabilities (Eke, 2013). Given its diverse population and complex socio-political landscape, Nigeria faces a myriad of national security challenges that profoundly impact its stability and development.

The rise of terrorist organizations, particularly Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), has posed a severe threat to national security. Boko Haram's insurgency, which began in 2009, has led to thousands of deaths and the displacement of millions, particularly in northeastern Nigeria. The group's attacks on civilians, security forces, and government facilities have not only destabilized the region but have also created a humanitarian crisis (Adetunji, 2017). The government's response has often included military interventions, which have sparked debates about human rights and the role of the media in reporting these incidents.

Beyond Boko Haram, other forms of insurgency, including separatist movements like the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), have emerged. These movements often arise from perceived marginalization and grievances related to governance, resource allocation, and ethnic identity. The violence and unrest associated with these insurgent groups pose significant challenges to national security, as they undermine the state's authority and exacerbate tensions among different ethnic and regional groups (Onuoha, 2014).

Nigeria has experienced significant civil unrest, driven by socio-economic issues, corruption, and political dissatisfaction. Protests such as the #EndSARS movement, which called for the disbandment of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) due to allegations of police brutality, highlight the deep-seated frustrations among the populace regarding governance and security (Ezeani, 2021). Such civil unrest can lead to violence, further complicating the national security landscape. The Nigerian government's national security strategy has thus broadened to include counter-terrorism efforts, cyber security initiatives, and measures to combat the illegal flow of arms, drugs, and human trafficking (Nte, 2011).

## 1.1 Perspectives on Media Ethics

Omoregbe (1993), who described ethics as one with the concern of “fundamental principles of morality, where some actions are labelled as good or bad, right or wrong, ethical or unethical, and the various criteria for making such judgements.” This could refer media ethics as the set of principles and standards that govern the conduct of journalists and media practitioners. It is therefore not surprising when Merrill and Barney (1982) in Onabajó (2021) describes the basic problems of journalism mainly as been ethical and philosophical. Media ethics encompasses various ethical considerations that aim to ensure responsible reporting. Lambeth (1986), as cited in Onabajó (2021) describes five principles of journalistic ethics. They are:

- a. *The Principle of Truth Telling:* Journalists are expected to seek the truth and report it accurately. This principle emphasizes the importance of factual reporting and the verification of information before dissemination (Ward, 2010).
- b. *The Principle of Justice:* Media ethics advocates for impartiality in reporting. Journalists should strive to present diverse viewpoints and avoid biases that could skew public perception (McQuail, 2010). This is particularly crucial in contexts like Nigeria, where national security issues can evoke strong emotions and polarized opinions.
- c. *The Principle of Freedom:* The journalist is expected to be free and disentangled from conflicts of the constitutional freedom that has been granted to the press.
- d. *The Principle of Humaneness:* As much as possible, a journalist should assist others, and prevent them from coming to harm.
- e. *The Principle of Stewardship:* Journalists must be accountable for their reporting. This includes acknowledging mistakes and correcting them promptly, as well as being open to scrutiny regarding their work (Plaisance, 2009). Accountability fosters public trust in the media, which is essential in democratic societies.

Thus, the relationship between media ethics and national security in Nigeria presents a complex dilemma, where the need for free expression must be carefully balanced against the imperative to maintain security (Aondover et al., 2025). The discussion will highlight how Nigerian media navigate the complex tension between informing the public and safeguarding national interests, while upholding ethical standards.

## 1.2 The Role of the Media in National Security

The media plays a pivotal role in promoting public awareness of national security through various mechanisms. Its primary function is the dissemination of information, where the provision of accurate, timely, and relevant news enhances public understanding of threats and necessary countermeasures, including government policies and security measures (Munteanu, 2020). This influence is vital in creating an informed citizenry that can engage with and respond to national security issues effectively (Aondover et al., 2024). In crisis situations, the media’s ability to provide real-time information can significantly shape public behavior, as demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic, where media coverage highlighted the national security implications of the health crisis (Ibrahim, 2020). Moreover, the media fosters a culture of security that promotes civic cohesion and national identity. An informed public is more likely to engage in discussions and initiatives that bolster national resilience, making citizens better equipped to respond to threats and support protective policies (Munteanu, 2020).

Through consistent reporting on risks and responses, the media has the power to contribute to social cohesion or exacerbate tensions, depending on the narratives presented. For example, media narratives surrounding terrorist activities can either increase public trust in government measures or undermine confidence by depicting security responses as

inadequate (Nwanne, 2021). The media's portrayal of national security issues frequently reflects and amplifies the government's stance, thus influencing policy decisions. During periods of heightened security threats, such as terrorist attacks, media coverage that depicts the government as effective or ineffective can sway public opinion and shape policy expectations (Abubakar, 2022). This underscores the significant responsibility journalists bear in reporting national security issues ethically and accurately.

In the Nigerian context, the role of the media in national security is particularly critical in gathering and disseminating information essential for maintaining public safety and national integrity. Ibagere (2010) notes that the mass media serves as a crucial instrument in promoting national security by monitoring potential breaches and reporting on issues that may threaten the state. By increasing public awareness, the media facilitates the implementation of necessary security measures. Additionally, the media transmits cultural values that underpin national security, reinforcing societal norms and collective identity, which contribute to the defense of the state.

Historically, the role of the media in Nigeria's national security has been shaped by political, social, and economic factors. During the colonial period, the media served as a tool for governance, disseminating information aligned with colonial interests. However, post-independence, the media assumed a more active role in shaping national discourse, particularly during the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), when government censorship and propaganda were widespread (Akinwumi, 2018). This period highlighted the tension between national security and press freedom, as the media's role shifted from being an independent watchdog to a vehicle for government messaging.

The return to civilian rule in 1999 marked a new era for press freedom in Nigeria, with journalists reporting more openly on security issues. However, the rise of militant groups such as the Niger Delta Avengers and Boko Haram presented new challenges. Reporting on these groups raised ethical dilemmas for journalists, who had to balance informing the public with the potential risk of inciting fear or violence (Mbah, 2020). Key events, such as the Chibok kidnapping in 2014, further illustrated the media's evolving role in national security. The extensive coverage of this incident drew international attention and demanded government accountability, demonstrating the media's power to shape public perception and influence policy responses (Fadipe, 2019).

## II. Review of Literature

This paper has as its theoretical framework within the context of social responsibility media theory of Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1963) and the framing theory propounded by Anthropologist Gregory Bateson, who was credited with first positing the theory in 1972. The main principles of the social responsibility theory are as follows:

- a. Media should provide information, entertainment, and education in a way that serves the public interest. This means they must present fair, accurate, and balanced news that fosters public understanding.
- b. The media is accountable not only to the owners and stakeholders but also to the audience. If the media fails to meet social expectations, there should be mechanisms for redress.
- c. The media should represent diverse viewpoints and cater to different sectors of society. This means giving voice to the voiceless and ensuring that no single perspective dominates.
- d. The media has an obligation to seek and report the truth. This involves diligent fact-checking and minimizing harm by avoiding sensationalism and misinformation.

- e. Media professionals are expected to adhere to high ethical standards. This includes respecting privacy, avoiding conflicts of interest, and ensuring objectivity.
- f. While the government may play a role in regulating the media to protect the public, the media should also engage in self-regulation through professional codes of conduct and ethical guidelines.
- g. The media should act as a platform for public debate, enabling citizens to engage in discussions about governance, policies, and societal issues. By doing so, it supports the functioning of a healthy democracy.

Similarly, Arowolo (2017) describes framing theory as “the practice of thinking about news items and story content within familiar context.” The theory suggests that the way in which information is framed can significantly shape public opinion by highlighting certain aspects of a story while downplaying others. There are several key concepts associated with framing:

- a. *Journalistic Selection and Presentation:* Journalists actively choose the topics they will cover and determine how these topics will be presented. This selection process influences not only which issues the audience thinks about (agenda-setting) but also how they think about these issues. The framing of stories shapes the narrative, emphasizing specific aspects while omitting others.
- b. *Audience Interpretation:* Audiences interpret information through their own pre-existing frames, which are shaped by personal experiences, beliefs, and societal influences. These frames may align with or contradict the media’s framing of an issue, leading to diverse interpretations of the same news event.
- c. *Reinforcement of Frames:* Frames become more ingrained in public discourse every time they are evoked, regardless of whether they are framed positively or negatively. Repeated exposure to a particular frame reinforces its dominance in the collective consciousness.
- d. *Frame Building:* Framing is not a one-time occurrence but rather a systematic process that develops over time. Frames are constructed and reconstructed through continuous interactions between journalists, the media, and the audience.

Due to time and resource constraints, journalists cannot cover every event comprehensively. They must select which stories to prioritize and decide which facts, values, and perspectives will be highlighted. In this process, journalists inevitably apply their own interpretive frames, influenced by various factors such as social norms, pressure from interest groups, journalistic routines, and their personal ideological or political orientations. This results in certain definitions, evaluations, and recommendations being emphasized over others, ultimately shaping how audiences perceive and interpret events.

### **III. Research Methods**

#### **3.1 Ethical Dilemmas Faced by Journalists**

Journalists in Nigeria face numerous ethical challenges when reporting on national security matters. One of the most significant ethical dilemmas arises from the conflict between freedom of expression and national security laws. In Nigeria, key legislation such as the Official Secrets Act and stringent libel laws place severe restrictions on journalists, making it difficult to report freely on national security issues. Enacted in 1962, the Official Secrets Act criminalizes the unauthorized disclosure of government information related to national security. The broad scope of this law allows the government to classify and withhold information from the public, often making it difficult for journalists to hold the

government accountable. The law's vagueness enables officials to use it as a tool to suppress investigative journalism, particularly on sensitive issues like military operations or negotiations with terrorist groups (Ojo, 2021). The chilling effect of this law is evident when journalists avoid investigating such issues for fear of prosecution.

Nigeria's libel laws, based on the Defamation Act, allow for lawsuits and financial penalties if journalists are found guilty of publishing defamatory content (Msughter & Pate, 2021). These laws have been weaponized by public figures and government officials to silence critical reporting, particularly when journalists expose corruption or misconduct related to national security. For example, investigative reports implicating military officials in corruption have led to defamation suits, discouraging further investigation into such cases (Agu, 2020).

Ibagere (2010) emphasizes the critical role the media play in enhancing national security by gathering and disseminating information that could identify threats to the nation. However, the media's attempts to fulfill this role sometimes result in actions that collide with legal boundaries, raising ethical questions about how much information can be responsibly reported. This dilemma is further complicated by the expectation that media practitioners must support national security objectives while ensuring they do not infringe on the law. The interplay between these legal frameworks and journalistic freedom creates an environment where self-censorship becomes a survival strategy for many media professionals. Journalists frequently choose to avoid reporting on national security topics to evade legal and personal risks, undermining their role in fostering transparency and accountability (Ogunleye, 2021).

Again, journalists in Nigeria are often caught in a difficult position when covering sensitive national security issues, such as terrorism, insurgency, and violence. Militants and government forces alike may target journalists who report on sensitive security issues. For instance, Nigerian journalist Ahmed Salkida, known for his reporting on Boko Haram, faced numerous threats from both insurgents and security forces, illustrating the danger of covering such volatile topics (Olatunji, 2019). These threats can also lead to self-censorship, with journalists opting to avoid coverage of certain stories out of fear for their safety and that of their families. Self-censorship is one of the most pervasive ethical dilemmas facing Nigerian journalists, particularly those covering national security topics. Journalists may choose to withhold information or refrain from publishing certain stories due to external pressures or fears of repercussions.

According to Shapley (1982), another ethical challenge identified is the difficulty in balancing the public's right to know with the need to protect sensitive information related to national security. This issue often forces journalists into a position where they must decide how much information can be responsibly shared without compromising the security of the state. Journalists also grapple with the ethical implications of reporting on violence and terrorism. Sensationalized reporting on violent incidents can desensitize the audience and stigmatize affected communities. Ethical journalism requires a careful balance between informing the public and avoiding content that could inflame tensions or fuel fear-mongering. For example, reports that focus on the trauma experienced by victims of insurgent attacks, without providing proper context, may inadvertently dehumanize those affected (Emenyonu, 2021; Aonover et al., 2025).

Another dilemma is the challenge of educating the public on highly technical and intricate aspects of national security, such as defense strategies or the implications of advanced weapon systems like the neutron bomb. Using the United States of America as a case study, Shapley (1982) discovers that the ethical tension arises from the need to present these issues in an engaging, visually compelling way without misleading or

oversimplifying the information. This raises questions about whether media coverage can truly provide the depth of understanding needed for the public to grasp the gravity of national security decisions.

Moreover, Nigerian journalists frequently face direct or indirect pressure from government officials and security agencies (Hile et al., 2023). These authorities may issue warnings or threats to prevent the publication of sensitive stories, especially those that could reveal government shortcomings. This pressure fosters a culture of compliance, where journalists feel they cannot report freely without facing serious consequences (Ojo, 2021). The current state of David Hundeyin, an investigative journalist, declared being wanted by the Nigerian security authorities, describes the pressure faced by Nigerian journalists from government officials. Many Nigerian journalists work under precarious economic conditions, making them vulnerable to external pressures. The fear of losing their jobs or jeopardizing the financial stability of their media outlets, which may rely on government advertising revenue, leads some journalists to avoid controversial stories. This economic dependence limits journalistic independence and stifles critical reporting on national security issues (Ogunleye, 2021).

### **3.2 The Impact of Social Media on Journalism and National Security**

The advent of social media has transformed the field of journalism, introducing new dynamics into the dissemination of information. Platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have democratized the process of news-sharing, allowing individuals to participate directly in the discourse on national security (Msughter et al., 2023). While this democratization has led to broader engagement, it has also introduced significant challenges related to the accuracy of information and the spread of misinformation. Social media platforms provide ordinary citizens with the means to create and share content, allowing diverse perspectives on national security to emerge. This democratization can enhance public awareness and engagement on critical issues. For example, during the Boko Haram insurgency, social media allowed users to share real-time updates and eyewitness accounts that traditional media may not have been able to cover promptly (Ibrahim, 2022; Nwodo, 2023).

While social media offers new opportunities for disseminating information, it also creates challenges for traditional journalism. The speed at which information spreads on social media can often outpace the verification processes of traditional news outlets, leading to the circulation of unverified content. Journalists face immense pressure to break news quickly, which can sometimes result in the spread of misinformation before it is properly vetted (Okon, 2022). This scenario is particularly dangerous in the context of national security, where inaccurate reporting can exacerbate tensions and hinder effective responses.

Social media platforms have also facilitated the rapid spread of both misinformation (false information shared without malicious intent) and disinformation (deliberately misleading information). In national security contexts, misinformation can inflame tensions, provoke public panic, and undermine trust in reliable news sources. For example, during periods of unrest, such as terrorist attacks or civil protests, false narratives can worsen conflicts and hinder government responses (Adedeji, 2021).

The dual-use nature of social media has complex implications for national security. On one hand, it provides intelligence agencies with tools for gathering real-time information and gauging public sentiment (Ogunyemi, 2022). On the other hand, social media can be exploited by insurgent groups or extremists to spread propaganda, recruit followers, and coordinate attacks. The use of platforms like YouTube or Twitter by groups

such as Boko Haram illustrates how these platforms can serve both as tools for engagement and threats to security (Ajayi, 2022).

### **3.3 Ethical Concerns of Social Media Intelligence**

Social Media Intelligence (SOCMINT) refers to the collection and analysis of data from social media platforms for security purposes. While SOCMINT offers valuable insights for journalists and security agencies, it raises ethical concerns, particularly regarding surveillance, privacy, and freedom of expression. The use of surveillance technologies to monitor social media activities can have a chilling effect on free expression. Journalists aware of potential surveillance may refrain from investigating sensitive stories or reporting on contentious national security issues. This environment of caution can undermine open discussions about national security issues and hinder journalistic efforts to report critically on such topics (Adeleke, 2022).

Moreover, journalists face ethical dilemmas when using SOCMINT to gather information. While social media is a rich source of public data, the means by which it is collected raises concerns about privacy and consent. Journalists must navigate the fine line between utilizing publicly available data and respecting individuals' privacy (Ogundipe, 2023). It is important to note that journalists have a responsibility to ensure that the information they publish is accurate and contextual. Given the potential for social media data to be manipulated or misinterpreted, journalists must critically assess the reliability of the information they obtain through SOCMINT, especially when reporting on sensitive national security matters (Adewale, 2022). Meanwhile, ethical journalism also demands transparency in how information is sourced. By disclosing their methods of gathering information, journalists can build trust with their audience, ensuring that the public can critically engage with the information presented to them (Fagbemi, 2021; Kurfi et al., 2023).

### **3.4 Role of Media Organizations and Regulatory Bodies**

Media organizations and regulatory bodies have an essential role in ensuring ethical standards are upheld, particularly in national security reporting. Established codes of ethics by bodies such as the NUJ and IFJ emphasize core principles like truthfulness, integrity, and respect for human dignity. The NUJ Code of Ethics, for instance, underscores the importance of accuracy and acting in the public interest both of which are critical in the context of national security reporting (NUJ, 2020).

The application of these codes becomes even more pertinent when journalists report on sensitive issues such as terrorism, insurgency, and civil unrest. Media organizations should take an active role in ensuring that journalists receive adequate training to familiarize themselves with these ethical standards and the dilemmas they might encounter (Ogunleye, 2022). Furthermore, oversight bodies like the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and the Nigeria Press Council (NPC) are tasked with monitoring compliance with these ethical codes. While these bodies serve as essential regulators, there are ongoing concerns about their effectiveness and independence. Striking a balance between regulatory oversight and maintaining journalistic autonomy remains a challenge (Adeleke, 2022).

In addition to regulatory oversight, media organizations can enhance accountability through self-regulatory initiatives. These may include establishing editorial guidelines, conducting internal reviews, and appointing ombudspersons to address ethical concerns raised by the public. Such mechanisms foster a culture of responsibility and reinforce journalists' commitment to ethical standards, especially in the context of national security

(Ogundipe, 2023). Public engagement is another critical aspect. Media organizations should involve the public in discussions about the ethical implications of reporting on national security issues. By promoting transparency and encouraging feedback, media organizations can strengthen their role as democratic watchdogs (Adewale, 2022).

Promoting ethical journalism education is also vital. Academic institutions must integrate ethical training into journalism curricula to prepare future journalists for the complexities of reporting on national security. This foundational education ensures that future journalists are equipped to handle ethical dilemmas and maintain high professional standards throughout their careers (Fagbemi, 2021).

### **3.5 Strategies for Maintaining Integrity in Reporting**

Maintaining journalistic integrity is particularly challenging in the context of national security, but several strategies can help ensure that journalists uphold ethical standards. A commitment to investigative journalism is one such strategy. Journalists must seek diverse perspectives and thoroughly investigate claims to provide the public with accurate and comprehensive information. Investigative journalism not only enhances credibility but also helps counter the spread of misinformation and sensationalism (Obi, 2022).

Adhering to ethical guidelines is another critical aspect. Media organizations should offer regular training sessions to keep journalists informed about ethical standards and foster a culture of accountability. Journalists must feel empowered to raise concerns when they encounter ethical challenges in their work (Ogunleye, 2022). Collaboration with experts in security, law, and ethics is also important. By consulting professionals, journalists can gain a deeper understanding of the complex issues they are covering, which can help them avoid bias and present more informed reports (Adeleke, 2022).

Fact-checking mechanisms are essential to maintaining the integrity of national security reporting. Journalists must prioritize accuracy over speed, using fact-checking tools to verify information before publication. This not only ensures that misinformation is minimized but also reinforces the credibility of the press (Fagbemi, 2021). Transparency in reporting is equally important. Journalists should be open about their sources, methodologies, and any potential conflicts of interest, as this builds trust with their audience and enhances accountability (Ogundipe, 2023).

Finally, promoting media literacy and advocating for press freedom are essential strategies. Journalists can educate the public on how to critically consume news, especially in an environment where misinformation can easily spread. Media literacy initiatives can include workshops, articles, and public discussions aimed at fostering a more informed citizenry (Adewale, 2022). Moreover, journalists must stand firm in their advocacy for press freedom, collaborating with civil society organizations and engaging in public discourse to protect the rights of the press. By doing so, they ensure that a diversity of voices is represented in national security discussions and that journalistic integrity is maintained (Obi, 2022).

#### **Notable Incidents**

The relationship between media coverage and national security issues in Nigeria has been shaped by several significant incidents that illustrate the challenges journalists face and the impact of media narratives on public perception and policy. One of the most significant cases is the coverage of the Boko Haram insurgency, which has been a central topic in national security discussions since its emergence in 2009. The media's portrayal of Boko Haram has notably influenced public perception and government responses. The abduction of 276 schoolgirls from Chibok in 2014, which garnered international attention,

sparked widespread outrage and mobilized the #BringBackOurGirls movement. This incident underscores the power of media to galvanize public opinion and demand government accountability (Adebanwi, 2020). However, some sensational reporting on the insurgency has been criticized for perpetuating fear and panic, thereby hindering a nuanced understanding of the complexities involved (Dibua, 2021).

Another pivotal moment in Nigeria's media landscape was the #EndSARS protests against police brutality in 2020. Journalists faced the challenge of reporting on a rapidly evolving situation where protesters were demanding systemic reforms. The media's role in documenting the protests, especially the tragic Lekki Toll Gate shooting on October 20, 2020, was critical in shaping public discourse. The discrepancies between the government's narrative and media reports highlighted the ethical dilemmas journalists faced in covering state violence, emphasizing the importance of accurate and responsible reporting in safeguarding human rights (Nwankwo, 2021). This case demonstrates how media can challenge state narratives and advocate for accountability.

The alarming rise of kidnappings for ransom in Nigeria has also posed significant challenges for journalists. In 2021, mass abductions, particularly of schoolchildren in northern Nigeria, received extensive media coverage. Ethical dilemmas emerged as media outlets struggled to balance the urgency of reporting these incidents with the potential to incite panic and endanger the victims (Ogunyemi, 2022). The case of the abduction of students from Bethel Baptist High School in Kaduna exemplifies these challenges, illustrating the need for responsible reporting that prioritizes the safety and well-being of affected individuals (Omojuwa, 2021).

Additionally, the rise of social media has transformed how national security issues are reported and consumed in Nigeria. During the COVID-19 pandemic, misinformation regarding the virus and related policies circulated widely on platforms like Twitter and Facebook, complicating the media's role in public health and safety (Bako, 2021). Journalists faced the challenge of addressing misinformation while ensuring that accurate information reached the public. The government's response, which included monitoring social media activity, raised concerns about censorship and the chilling effects on free expression, highlighting the ethical implications of utilizing social media intelligence in national security discourse (Idris, 2021).

Lastly, the introduction of laws such as the Hate Speech Bill and the Social Media Bill sparked intense media debates about freedom of expression and national security in Nigeria. These legislative efforts aimed to curb hate speech and misinformation, yet many journalists and civil society organizations argued that they posed significant threats to press freedom and democratic discourse (Nwodo, 2021). The media's coverage of these issues played a crucial role in informing the public and fostering discussions about balancing national security with freedom of expression. These case studies show the impact of media coverage in the context of national security in Nigeria, illustrating how journalists navigate ethical dilemmas while highlighting the significant influence media narratives have on public perception and policy decisions.

#### **IV. Result and Discussion**

Examining notable incidents involving media coverage of national security issues in Nigeria reveals critical lessons and implications for future reporting. The Boko Haram insurgency serves as a prime example of how media coverage can shape public understanding and government response to security threats. The extensive media attention surrounding the abduction of the Chibok girls mobilized both national and international

outrage, leading to increased scrutiny of government inaction and calls for accountability (Adebanwi, 2020). This case exemplifies the power of media in fostering public awareness and catalyzing policy changes, highlighting the responsibility journalists have to accurately report such events.

The reporting on the #EndSARS protests and subsequent violence serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of sensationalism. While the media played a crucial role in documenting the protests and raising awareness about police brutality, the sensationalist framing of events sometimes overshadowed broader societal issues. This underscores the need for journalists to maintain ethical standards and strive for balanced reporting that contextualizes events rather than sensationalizes them, ensuring that the narrative contributes to informed public discourse (Nwankwo, 2021).

Furthermore, the coverage of mass kidnappings emphasizes the ethical responsibilities journalists face in balancing the urgency of reporting with the potential consequences of their narratives. Sensitive reporting on such issues requires a commitment to accuracy and responsibility, as sensationalized accounts can exacerbate public fear and hinder efforts to resolve crises (Ogunyemi, 2022). Journalists must develop guidelines that prioritize the safety and dignity of victims while fulfilling their duty to inform the public. The rise of misinformation on social media during the COVID-19 pandemic highlights the need for journalists to be vigilant in their reporting. The ethical implications of surveillance and the chilling effects on free expression are significant concerns that must be addressed. Journalists should be equipped with tools to identify and counter misinformation while advocating for policies that protect press freedom and promote transparency (Bako, 2021; Idris, 2021).

Finally, the media's coverage of proposed laws like the Hate Speech Bill and the Social Media Bill underscores the essential role journalists play in informing public debates and advocating for democratic principles. Journalists must actively engage in discussions about the implications of such legislation for press freedom and national security, ensuring that their reporting contributes to a balanced understanding of the issues at stake (Nwodo, 2021). This engagement can empower civil society and enhance accountability in governance.

The insights gained from these case studies indicate a pressing need for ongoing media training programs focused on ethics and responsible reporting in national security contexts. Establishing clear guidelines for sensitive reporting, fostering a culture of accountability, and encouraging collaboration between journalists, media organizations, and regulatory bodies are crucial steps in navigating the complex landscape of national security reporting in Nigeria.

## V. Conclusion

In this paper, we have explored the intricate relationship between media ethics and national security in Nigeria, emphasizing the ethical dilemmas that journalists encounter in their reporting practices. National security is of paramount importance in Nigeria, given the persistent threats posed by terrorism, insurgency, and civil unrest. The media plays a crucial role in shaping public perception and policy responses to these challenges. The interplay between media and national security significantly influences public understanding and policy decisions. Ethical journalism is vital in providing accurate and balanced reporting that informs citizens while safeguarding national security interests.

The role of media in national security is multifaceted, serving as a key player in shaping narratives surrounding security threats. Historical contexts illustrate the evolving

role of media in national security debates and policies, notably through coverage of groups like Boko Haram. Journalists encounter numerous pressures when reporting on sensitive national security issues, facing conflicts between freedom of expression and restrictive national security laws. Additionally, self-censorship due to fear of repercussions is prevalent among journalists navigating these complexities.

The rise of social media has further transformed traditional journalism, introducing ethical concerns related to misinformation and surveillance. The implications of social media intelligence (SOCMINT) and its effect on free expression necessitate careful consideration by journalists. A framework for ethical reporting is essential for journalists covering national security, including adherence to established codes of ethics and effective strategies to maintain journalistic integrity. Notable incidents of media coverage have provided valuable lessons, revealing the need for responsible journalism that prioritizes accuracy and ethical considerations.

In conclusion, ethical journalism is paramount in navigating the complex terrain of national security in Nigeria. As journalists strive to balance freedom of expression with security concerns, the role of media organizations, regulatory bodies, and civil society will be crucial in fostering an environment where ethical standards are upheld. This commitment to ethics will ultimately enhance the overall quality of national security reporting in the country.

## **Recommendations**

To address the ethical dilemmas journalists face in reporting national security issues, comprehensive media training programs that emphasize ethics and responsible reporting should be implemented. These programs should focus on several key components to ensure effective and ethical journalism. First, curriculum development is essential. A well-designed curriculum should include ethics in journalism, covering core principles such as truthfulness, fairness, accountability, and the dangers of sensationalism. This curriculum should emphasize the ethical responsibilities journalists hold when covering sensitive national security topics (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2020). Additionally, modules on national security issues, particularly in Nigeria, should be incorporated to provide journalists with a comprehensive understanding of terrorism, insurgency, and civil unrest. Understanding the socio-political context of these issues will enable journalists to report accurately and responsibly (Ogunyemi, 2022).

Again, workshops and seminars should be organized to provide journalists with practical skills in ethical decision-making and crisis reporting. Interactive workshops, using role-playing scenarios and case studies, can help journalists navigate complex reporting situations while considering the ethical implications of their work (Bako, 2021). Furthermore, inviting experts in national security, law, and ethics to participate in seminars can foster dialogue between journalists and experts, enhancing understanding of the legal and ethical considerations surrounding national security reporting (Nwankwo, 2021).

Moreover, partnerships with media organizations should be encouraged. Collaboration between media houses, academic institutions, and professional bodies can ensure that training programs are tailored to the needs of the industry and address contemporary challenges in national security reporting (Idris, 2021). Mentorship programs should also be established, where experienced journalists guide younger reporters on best practices in ethical journalism, particularly in sensitive areas. Finally, continuous professional development is crucial. Journalists should have opportunities for ongoing training, such as online courses, webinars, and refresher workshops, to stay updated on evolving ethical standards and national security issues (Adebanwi, 2020). Ethical reporting

initiatives that encourage reflection on ethical practices and sharing experiences related to national security reporting can foster a culture of accountability and transparency within the journalism community.

To ensure a balanced approach to media freedom and national security in Nigeria, several policy reforms should be proposed. These reforms aim to protect journalistic freedoms while addressing national security concerns. One critical area of reform is the review of national security laws. For instance, the Official Secrets Act should be reassessed to reduce ambiguities that often lead to its misuse against journalists. A clear definition of what constitutes a threat to national security is necessary to prevent arbitrary censorship (Adegoke, 2020). Enhancements to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) are also needed, ensuring that journalists have better access to government information. This will enable more accurate reporting on national security issues without undue restrictions (Omotola, 2021).

Legal protections for journalists are another crucial area for reform. Implementing robust whistleblower protections for journalists reporting on government misconduct or security-related issues would encourage transparency and accountability in governance while protecting journalists from retaliation (Iorpu, 2022). Additionally, libel laws should be reformed to decriminalize offenses against journalists, replacing punitive measures with civil penalties, thus protecting them from harassment while ensuring responsible reporting (Afolabi, 2021).

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