



## **APPRAISAL OF HAZARDS IN JOURNALISM PRACTICE DURING CIVILIAN ADMINISTRATIONS IN NIGERIA (1999- 2019)**

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### **Abstract**

There are serious hazards that are capable of discouraging people who want to join journalism practice in Nigeria and other countries of the world. This study examined the hazards in journalism practice during Nigeria's democratic dispensation spanning the years from 1999 to 2019. It investigated the hazards which Nigerian journalists experienced within the two decades of uninterrupted civilian administration in the country. Survey research design was adopted with a population of three thousand and five registered journalists, with sample size of 121 drawn using Australian Calculator, whereas the questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection. Stratified random sampling and simple random sampling techniques were used in selection of the sample studied. The results of the investigation revealed that killing, kidnapping, maiming and physical assaults to media practitioners were the hazards journalists encountered in Nigeria within the period under review. Also, the results showed that physical assault ranks as the commonest hazard of journalism practice in Nigeria. Meanwhile, it was revealed that Nigerian journalists applied their skills and wealth of experience to mitigate or utterly avoid some of the possible hazards. The researchers' recommendations include that: Nigerian journalism curriculum developers should include courses on safety measures for the hazards in media practice curricular. Also, Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) was urged to canvass for enactment of laws making physical assault and kidnapping of journalists as criminal offences in the country.

**Keywords:** Civil rule, hazards, journalism, journalists, mass media, pro-media, press



## Introduction

Journalism as one of the professions that kicked off during the colonial era in Nigeria faced chain of hazards from the time of the colonial overlords. The then colonial masters coerced many journalists to support the colonial government affairs in the country. The colonialists invariably used the press as part of the means to perpetuate and sustain colonial rule in Nigeria, nay, Africa. Eventually, when the nationalists learnt the tricks of the profession and turned it as an instrument to fight colonialism, the colonial masters opposed the practice with promulgation of anti-press laws as part of their measures to secure allegiance.

Unfortunately, after independence, the successive Nigerian Governments retained some of the anti-press laws inherited from the colonialists and apply them to muzzle the media. For instance, the Official Secret Act that was obviously a colonial phenomenon is still in existence in Nigeria. In addition, during the military regimes in the country, more media oppressive decrees were promulgated as parts of grand designs to gag the press. The laws have been used to maltreat journalists in Nigeria. With the country's return to democracy and adoption of a constitution that provides for the freedom of the press in 1999, yet the obnoxious military decrees used to suppress the press are still effective indirectly in the democratic administrations as acts of the parliaments. Owing to the foregoing, it has been observed that:

Media freedom in Nigeria had perked up since the inception of democratic regime in 1999. However, restraining orders continue to oblige the newspaper media system in Nigeria to some extent. Notwithstanding that press freedom is observed, but restrictive decrees adopted during military era still remain. For instance, the decree that empowers security agents to arrest and detain media persons who publish information that brings the Federal Government of Nigeria to disrepute is still enforceable to date. Journalists and reporters still suffer unfair police raids and arrests; they also face political and socio religious assaults and assassinations (Uwosomah, 2010).

All professions in the world have peculiar hazards that the practitioners grapple with from time to time, but the practitioners devise means to mitigate the hazards in different dimensions. Being a profession that brings to front burner the crimes or failures of people, especially the ruling class, history is replete with oppressive acts against journalism practitioners in many countries. Generally, when journalism critically scrutinizes the affairs of the government, the state political actors would see the press as an unruly institution standing against the progress of the state. For the media audience, the institution is an instrument that could stir the society



and join to fight underhanded dealings in the government, non-governmental organisations and the organised private sector. The above view corroborates one of the editorials of a Nigerian newspaper which observes that:

As anyone who has associated with, or has worked as a journalist knows, genuine practice of journalism as truth-bearing and truth-telling is no mean profession. Genuine journalists are custodians of the moral values of the society: they form the ombudsman for the state-actors and negotiators for non-state actors and are the gadfly that stings the people to lawful uprising in situations of crass ineptitude and injustice (*The Guardian*, 2019).

Thus, in its service to humanity journalism as a profession had been on the brink of dilemma. That is perhaps why Dan Agbese, a veteran Nigerian journalist and famous columnist of the defunct *Newswatch*, lamented that, “journalism has had a troubled but history, (Agbese, 2008, p. 12).” At certain times in Nigeria, some private magazines and newspapers were proscribed, and government security agents hounded the publishers with their journalists. Similarly, many television stations have been banned, fined and their journalists molested for their criticisms of the activities of the government. Journalism practice in Nigeria today has become quite frightening for the practitioners. This is often attributed to incidents of humiliation, insecurity and assassinations that have trailed the profession lately. The trend has, in fact, exacerbated, despite efforts to tackle it (Maduabuchi, 2010).

The role of journalism towards enhancement of the citizens’ enlightenment and awareness about issues in society cannot be overemphasized. Journalists are the bridge that helps the leaders to reach and attend to the needs of their people. In its section 22, the *1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, as amended*, gives the press an onerous responsibility to ensure that the leaders are accountable to the masses. However, in discharging this mandate given to the press, it has been observed that prior to now, Nigerian journalists often encountered series of hazards from the people, the governments, and their agents. Reporters face arbitrary arrest, sexual or physical harassment, manhandling, seizure and confiscation of equipment and blackmail by lawful security personnel and civilians in course of news work, as internal and external regulatory bodies often fail to protect them (Etete, 2017). As the country returned to democracy in 1999, it is expected that there would be a positive change with regard to how journalists are treated, however, there are no obvious empirical evidence to prove the expectation.

### **Statement of the problem**



Journalists face a lot of hazards in the course of their work during military regimes in Nigeria as recorded history has revealed over the years. There were chains of oppressive decrees promulgated and some were made with retrospective effects just to victimise media practitioners. Successive Nigerian military Governments had their patterns of victimization and oppression of journalists. Some journalists were killed, and many others were jailed repeatedly. Also, many media houses were arbitrarily shut down on the directives of the government for flimsy reasons.

There was an expectation that journalists should have a sigh of relief when the country transitioned to civil administration on May 29, 1999. The transition came with some hallmarks of democratic rule which include the use of the constitution supposedly dictating freedom of the media to operate. Also, generally, democracy as a form of government provides that governments and individuals respect court judgements and orders. Sequel to all that, journalism is envisaged to thrive in a democratic setting more than during a military era where fundamental human rights are often neglected. In addition to the constitutional provision that gives support to freedom of the press in Nigeria, the passage of Freedom of Information Bill (FoI) into law was a pro-media stride achieved within one of the democratic dispensations under review in this study. Nigeria has experimented uninterrupted democratic administration for over twenty years, but how journalism practice had fared in the country within the period as regards the hazards of the practice, is still buried in empirical obscurity. This forms the problem which this study sought to systematically unravel.

### **Objectives of the study**

This study was guided by the following three objectives namely:

- 1) To ascertain the hazards which journalists encounter in journalism practice during the civil rule in Nigeria from 1999 to 2019.
- 2) To find out the commonest hazards which journalists encounter in journalism practice in Nigeria within the period of 1999 to 2019.
- 3) To determine the measures Nigerian journalists adopted to avoid some of the hazards they encountered in journalism practice in the democratic administrations under review.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions below were answered in the course of this study:



- 1) What were the hazards that journalists encounter in journalism practice since the return to the civil rule in Nigeria from 1999 to 2019?
- 2) What is the commonest hazard which journalists encounter in Nigeria within the democratic administrations from 1999 to 2019?
- 3) What are the measures Nigerian journalists adopted to avoid some of the hazards they encountered in journalism practice in the democratic administrations under review?

## **Review of related literature**

### **Inception of journalism practice in Nigeria**

According to recorded facts, Nigeria was not the first or second nation where journalism commenced initially in the African continent, as profession started over fifty years in other parts of Africa before it entered Nigeria. This is evident in the submission that the Nigerian press is not the oldest on the continent, or even in the West African sub-region. Nigeria's earliest newspapers emerged after those of Sierra Leone (1801), Ghana (1822) and Liberia (1826), and were started by Anglican missionaries (Maringues, 2001). Meanwhile, the contemporary Nigerian journalism is adjudged as one of the most dynamic in African continent. It should be noted that journalism in Nigeria like in other countries where the press existed earlier emerged as a colonial-cum-missionary work instrument (Okunna & Omenugha, 2012).

Journalism was one of the legacies which the colonial masters bequeathed to Nigerians and they used it to champion their struggle for self-rule as a nation. So, foreigners laid the foundation of journalism that is in existence in Nigeria now. "The British heavily influenced early Nigerian journalism, although it may sound ironical to note that the exact origins of Nigerian journalism are somehow unclear. This is to say that it is difficult to find clear-cut records of its exact beginning," (Okafor, 2002, p. 39). While some scholars share the same view with Okafor's submission above, many other Nigerian media scholars differ in their own account about the origin of journalism in the country.

The history of the Nigerian press has it variously that, a Scottish missionary, Rev. Henry Townsend, who was sent for Christianity evangelism expedition, established the first ever known newspaper at Abeokuta, the Capital of the present Ogun State, Nigeria, in 1859, (Okunna & Omenugha, 2012; Ndolo, 2006). So, the history of journalism in Nigeria was dated back to the early colonial era contrary to the view of (Ibbi, 2016) that journalism in Nigeria has its roots from the days of the struggle for independence from the British colonialists. The origin



of the current Nigerian journalism is captured in the words of **All Africa**, which notes that, “when Reverend Henry Townsend, the founder of journalism in Nigeria, introduced the profession by publishing the first tabloid ‘*Iwe Irohin Fun Awon Ara Egba*’ on November 23, 1859, he probably had no inkling how far his idea would stretch through the decades. However, 160 years down the line, journalism has truly evolved in Nigeria from sectional to national and even global reportage,” (**All Africa**, 2018).

Nigerian journalism thrived in the early stage with the print media being the available means of mass communication for decades. It is worthwhile to note that foreigners pioneered journalism practice in Nigeria. After Rev. Townsend’s establishment of the first newspaper, Robert Campbell established another newspaper called Anglo-African in the year 1863. It was the first newspaper published in Lagos. These initial newspapers essentially played the role of enlightening the people, for instance, ‘*Iwe irohin*’ was primarily established to get the people to know how to read and write. Thus, the maiden form of journalism practice in Nigeria came with the mission to educate the people. The fact that journalism in Nigeria started as parts of the phenomena in Christian missionary was portrayed in the view of All Africa (2018) which explained how Rev. Townsend deviated a bit from his initial assignment. All Africa (2018) observes that, Henry Townsend, a Scottish missionary sent from Exeter, in United Kingdom to preach and propagate the ethos of Christianity to the communities and also spread the gospel to all corners of Nigeria. Rev. Townsend established the first newspaper in Nigeria, knowing that he would not be able to communicate effectively and spread the gospel message among the people without affording them the opportunity to be able to read and write.

So, Rev. Townsend had to establish ‘*Iwe Irohin*,’ a Yoruba-Language newspaper which was established, according to Townsend established purposely “to get the people to read; to beget the habit of seeking information by reading, (Okunna & Omenugha, 2012, p. 90).” He ensured that the paper would be helpful to him in his work of propagating the gospel. To that effect, “the newspaper reflected both the religious profession of Rev. Townsend and his reason for establishing the newspaper. Thus, the paper carried a combination of religious reporting and social and political commentary,” (Okunna & Omenugha, 2012, p. 90). Thus, at the period, journalism in Nigeria as an instrument for Christian evangelism was devoted to public enlightenment. Thus, every documented fact virtually has no record of hazards encountered in the early part of the profession.

However, when the newspaper (the press) changed its coverage direction to include in their reportorial matters what offended the colonial interests, the colonial sledged the publication.



The '*Iwe Irohin*,' which focused on religious activities earlier, but also later devoted a lot of space to subjects like the abolition of slavery, education, and civil rights, quickly fell afoul of the colonial authorities in Lagos, and Townsend was consequently sent back to Britain, (Maringues, 2001). In addition, the natives burnt down the newspaper in a communal crisis that later turned anti-white riots in Abeokuta (Okafor, 2002; Maringues, 2001). All these indicated when and how the hazards of journalism practice in Nigeria started.

Most of the newspapers established after '*Iwe Irohin*,' were anti-colonial in their reportage. Consequently, the British colonialists promulgated anti-press laws to gag journalism at the moment. This was clearly captured by Maringues (2001) who states that:

The colonial administration introduced legislation aimed at controlling the press. In 1903, a set of 'publishers' obligations' was introduced which made it mandatory for a copy of every issue of a newspaper to be submitted to the authorities. In 1909, an anti-sedition decree was promulgated which threatened two years' imprisonment for those who 'through speech or writing' encouraged anti-government sentiments.

The unfavourable legislations of the colonialists were used to unleash unwarranted inhuman treatments to the journalists whose publications were adjudged to be against the colonial government. Through the instrumentality of the draconian laws, the British overlords jailed many press men and tortured a lot of others. Before the independence of Nigeria in 1960, many newspapers established then fought colonialism and its inherent obnoxious policies in the country. The successive Nigerian governments from independence to date, still inadvertently apply the colonial masters' inhuman and oppressive acts against the journalists. So, the Nigerian media are parts of some institutions which activities are regulated with the laws made from the colonial era.

### **Hazards in journalism practice globally**

Hazards in journalism has been a global phenomenon, for instance a researcher reports that, for the third year in a row, 251 or more journalists are jailed around the world, suggesting the authoritarian approach to critical news coverage is more than a temporary spike. China, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia imprisoned more journalists than last year, and Turkey remained the world's worst jailer, (Beiser, 2018). The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) revealed that, globally 5 journalists have been killed in this year 2019, while 250 were imprisoned in 2018, and 63 others were missing globally, (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2023). The CPJ also outlined the number of journalists killed globally from the year 1992 to 2019 as presented in the table below:

**Table 1: The number of journalists killed globally from the year 1992 to 2022**

No. of killed journalists	Year of their death	No. of killed journalists	Year of their death	No. of killed journalists	Year of their death
44	1992	42	2003	51	2014
56	1993	61	2004	73	2015
66	1994	50	2005	50	2016
51	1995	57	2006	47	2017
26	1996	70	2007	54	2018
26	1997	42	2008	6	2019
24	1998	72	2009	32	2020
36	1999	44	2010	45	2021
24	2000	49	2011	67	2022
37	2001	74	2012		
21	2002	74	2013		

**Source:** (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2023).

The above table gives the clue of the number of journalists who were killed while carrying out their journalistic duties across different countries of the world from the year 1992 to 2022.

The experiences presented above are the records of an international body that documents the travails of journalists that they captured in any part of the world on daily basis with their system. Reporters without Borders, another international recognised body that reports intensively about matters pertaining to journalists gives another account of the state of threats to journalists in their 2019 report. In their 2019 World Press Freedom Index report, the body noted that, “...hatred of journalists has degenerated into violence, contributing to an increase in fear. The number of countries regarded as safe, where journalists can work in complete security, continues to decline, while authoritarian regimes continue to tighten their grip on the media,”(Reporters without Borders, 2019).

The Reporters without Borders clearly paints a picture of worsening condition of journalism practice in the world noting that, only 24 percent of the 180 countries and territories are classified as “good” or “fairly good” as opposed to 26 percent last year. As a result of an increasingly hostile climate that goes beyond Donald Trump’s comments, the United States (48th) has fallen three places in this year’s Index and the media climate in the world is now classified as “problematic,” (Reporters without Borders, 2019).



The 2019 report of Reporters without Borders indicts even the United States of America, a country rated as an advanced democracy where journalists were fairly treated prior to now. According to Reporters without Borders (RSF):

Never before have US journalists been subjected to so many death threats or turned so often to private security firms for protection. Hatred of the media is now such that a man walked into the *Capital Gazette* newsroom in Annapolis, Maryland, in June 2018 and opened fire, killing four journalists and one other member of the newspaper's staff. The gunman had repeatedly expressed his hatred for the paper on social networks before ultimately acting on his words, (Reporters without Borders, 2019).

Contrarily, the Reporters without Borders revealed in their 2019 reports that some known authoritarian governments in some countries have allayed their torturing of journalists. According to a part of their 2019 report, the body (RWB) notes that many autocratic regimes have fallen in the Index, for instance Venezuela (down five at 148th), where journalists have been the victims of arrests and violence by security forces, and Russia (down one at 149th), where the Kremlin has used arrests, arbitrary searches, and draconian laws to step up the pressure on independent media and the Internet. Reporters without Borders (2019) observes that at the bottom of the Index, "both Vietnam (176th) and China (177th) have fallen one place, Eritrea (up 1 at 178th) is third from last, despite making peace with its neighbour Ethiopia, and Turkmenistan (down two at 180th) is now last, replacing North Korea (up one at 179th)." Interestingly, the Reporters without Border's 2019 report paint a fair picture of treatment of journalists in Africa in their regional accounts. Perhaps, the most exciting part of their report is that Nigeria is not among the countries ranked high in ill-treatment of journalists across the world and in African continent particularly.

### **Journalism and Democracy in Nigeria**

Many scholars have revealed how the mass media were deployed as the instruments in canvassing for the independence of Nigeria and other African countries prior to the coming of political parties in the continent. "The chief weapon of the nationalist movement in West Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was the newspaper press. In the absence of political parties...the newspapers were the only significant vehicle of public opinion and the medium of



political pressure and propaganda,” (Omu, 1974, p. 521). “The Nigerian mass media have come a long way in the struggle for the enthronement of democracy in the country. The mass media have been playing this active role since the inception of the first newspaper established by Reverend Henry Townsend in Abeokuta,” (Santas & Ogoshi, 2016, p. 74).

The existence and the operations of the mass media in a country are used or seen as the means to determine the nature, presence, or total absence of democracy in any nation. As a result, a researcher argues that the media epitomize what has often been described as the unfettered freedom of expression of ideas and opinions in a society. In other words, it acts as the thermometer of measuring the democratic body temperature of a country or society,” (Ocitti, 1999, p. 6). However, this view is not a true reflection of what is the reality about the mass media. The true reality is that the kind of democracy or governance in any nation determines how their mass media operate or how journalism is practised in the country. This could be seen from the proposition of normative theory of the press which stresses that, the media in all societies take the shape of the social activities and the nature of the government available in the country. The absence of true democracy in Nigeria has thrown into the abyss of uncertainty the existential question of the singular appropriate media theory that captures the kind of media practice in the country. This is because the crux of the principle of normative theory is simply that, the nature of the government existing in a country dictates how the media can operate there.

Folarin (2002, p.27) better captures the above submissions noting that, “the basic assumption of normative theory, as we were told, is that “the press always takes on the form and coloration of the social and political structures within which it operates,”(Siebert et al. 1956:1; see also Kunczick 1988:46). The failure of all the past and present governments of Nigeria to expunge some anti-media laws is a pointer to their subtle negative disposition to the mass media and this arguably affects the operations of journalists in the country. Nigerian media scholars observe that, “there is an increasing commercialisation of the media in Nigeria, the situation that has brought the integrity of the mass media enterprise to question,” (Asogwa & Asemah, 2012, p. 27).

Another evidence of undemocratic posture of Nigerian Government that could easily expose journalism practitioners to hazards is that the *1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended* did not make a specific provision that protects the mass media and the



journalists. The Nigerian Constitution for instance provides in section 22 that, “the press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold...the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people,” (1999 *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended)*, 1999). Thus, in the course of discharging their responsibilities to the people, the media are charged to hold the government accountable. However, there is no place, the Nigerian constitution made specific provisions for protection of journalists and media outfits, in case of any attack on them by unscrupulous individuals, governments or their agents.

### **Overview of Nigerian media practice experience**

The case of Nigeria’s media landscape could be described as tragicomedy. Nigerian media are proclaimed the most vibrant in African continent, but that does not spare the journalists and media houses in the country from ill-treatments from people in power. A researcher explains clearly what could be described as the tragic dimension of the Nigerian landscape as he notes that:

Nigeria possesses one of Africa’s most vibrant and still thriving media on the continent in almost five decades, the Nigerian media has blossomed and survived several attempts at curbing it. With over 100 newspapers and magazines in circulation and presently over 40 television stations with about a dozen of them privately owned and a proliferation of about 100 AM and FM (mostly private) radio stations, the media are not doing badly, (Dare, 2011, p. 11).

While the above submission is a pleasant report, there is an unpleasant aspect of it. The Freedom House Report of 2010 as cited in (Dare, 2011, p. 12) reveals the travails of the Nigerian media practitioners stating that, “State Security Service (SSS) agents arrest journalists, confiscate newspapers, and harass vendors, notably when journalists are covering corruption or separatist and communal violence. Local authorities frequently condemn those who criticize them, and as cases of violence against journalists often go unsolved, suspicion surrounds the motives and perpetrators.” The insight about the oppression of Nigerian journalists has been chronicled severally in the country. It has been noted that, “journalists are killed, jailed, horsewhipped, branded coup plotters, broken bottles used to shave their heads, their media houses closed, newspapers proscribed, and licenses withdrawn even if temporarily,” (Ndolo, 2011, p. 8). All these have been the ordeals which journalists were subjected to at different points in Nigeria. It is worthwhile to point out that, none of those travails which Nigerian media practitioners grapple with made them to be discouraged in



journalism practice. So, it could be said that the courage, doggedness, and resilience of Nigerian journalists give the impression that media practice in the country is the most vibrant in Africa as some researchers have reported.

The *1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended* provided a somehow better conducive atmosphere for journalist to thrive in the practice. The condition in the democratic era with the challenges was better than the military rule experience where decrees and edicts with even retrospective effects were used to hound the media and the practitioners. Thus, the democratic period provided Nigerian journalists the ground to champion such a course like the passage of freedom of information bill into law as achieved on May 28, 2011. The milestone was a feat which many analysts described as a boost to journalism practice. The Freedom of Information (FOI) Act supersedes the Official Secrets Act (OSA) originally enacted in 1911, (Yusuf, 2012). As earlier observed in this study, some of the colonial legislations were neither jettisoned nor abolished after Nigeria's independence. For instance, with regard to broadcasting particularly, it has been noted that, "on independence, Nigeria inherited from the colonial masters certain laws that affected broadcasting," (Udejah, 2004, p. 231). Some Nigerian media scholars have affirmed that most of the "colonial laws are yet to be repealed," (Ndolo & Ezinwa, 2011, p. 235). Quoting Alabi (2003), Ndolo and Ezinwa, (2011, p. 235) explain the scenario from its print media origin to the expansion and extension to the entire media industry after Nigeria's independence as pointed out below:

On independence Nigeria still retain many of the draconian laws which the colonial masters used to gag the press such as the 1903 newspaper ordinance and the 1917 newspaper ordinance. He stressed that Nigeria not only retained these laws but also promulgated other stringent laws after independence, such as the Defamation Act of 1961, Seditious Meeting Act of 1961, Official Secrets Act of 1962, Newspaper (Amendment) Act of 1964, Cinematography Act No.7 1963, Constitution of the Federation Adaptation of Laws (miscellaneous powers) November 1964. These laws were made by civilian government.

By a cursory examination of the dates of the above obnoxious laws, they were made under the immediate Nigerian civilian government that took power from the colonial masters. The negative trend of using obnoxious laws to gag the mass media was exacerbated with the successive Nigerian military administrations that ruled for considerable length of time. In the civilian rules, some of the anti-press laws were more or less scarecrows but in the military regimes, they were put in effect to the letter even prior to their date of promulgation. Nine anti-



press laws of Nigerian military regimes were outlined by (Ndolo & Ezinwa, 2011) and media practitioners and establishments were sledged with one or more of them at different points.

Besides, Adaja (2012) revealed that journalism practice in Nigeria has raised a lot of questions as to the propriety of referring to it as a full-fledged profession, noting that the loose definition of the criteria for membership of journalism profession in Nigeria has made it like an all-comers affair. As a solution to reposition journalism practice in the country, he recommended that there should be “a revisit to the existing code of conduct to explicitly state those who can practice journalism in Nigeria,” (Adaja, 2012). He also, recommended that, an acceptable remuneration package comparable with other professions must be worked out for journalists in Nigeria. In one of the studies conducted in the country, it was revealed that in Nigeria, “poor remuneration, personal greed and corruption are some of the reasons why news commercialization thrives,” (Oberiri, 2016, p. 63). The researcher recommended that the solutions to overcome the problems should be that media professional bodies should be serious in maintaining ethics in the media industry by sanctioning defaulting journalists.

Contrary to the views of the above authors, Umaru and Idris (2017) revealed that Nigerian journalists even at the threat of their lives maintained constant reportage of Boko Haram terrorism and violence in the North-East Nigeria where many people deserted. “But, while most people kept away from the zone at the height of the violence, bombings and killings in the region, Nigerian journalists remained active in reporting even at the threat of their lives in events. They risked dangerous situations, braved real threats, and used multiple precautionary measures to survive in order to report. Without insurance coverage and training in safety skills,” (Umaru & Idris, 2017, p. 160). The scholars reiterated the dangers in the practice of journalism in Nigeria noting that with lack of incentives, poor and irregular salaries Nigerian journalists in the theatre of the Boko Haram conflict became an endangered group. “Some were killed, many were injured, and most were threatened by the terrorists as well as the authorities. Media houses and their staff were subjected to multiple and conflicting pressures from the public, the terrorists, and the security system,” (Umaru & Idris, 2017, p. 160). The researchers note that Boko Haram sect had killed some journalists “from 2009 to 2015, the group killed four Nigerian journalists. In October 2011, terrorists of the sect shot dead Zakariyya Isa, a cameraman with the *Nigerian Television Authority* (NTA) in Borno State, “for working against the interests of the sect.” The



sect said it killed Isa on the suspicion that he fed security officials with information about their activities,” (Umaru & Idris, 2017, pp. 163-164).

Prior to the advent of terrorism in Nigeria, the reported killings of journalists often were largely attributed to government agents. But the Boko Haram terrorism has opened another vista for attacks and killings of journalists in the country. Thus, Nigerian media practitioners were awakened to be more vigilant in their reportage of terrorism as they were with coverage of military governments’ activities after the murder of Mr Dele Giwa of the defunct *Newswatch*. The gruesome killing of Mr Giwa was regarded a ‘journalism martyr’ in Nigeria as he was reportedly murdered on journalistic duty. Maringues (2001) recounted how Mr Giwa was murdered during the regime of General Ibrahim Babangida, noting that:

On 17 October 1986, Editor Dele Giwa was invited for a ‘little chat’ by the deputy head of the State Security Service (SSS). Two days later a parcel bomb with an official stamp was delivered to his home. The bomb exploded as he tried to open the envelope and he died a few hours later. Despite the efforts of opposition Lawyer Gani Fawehinmi, the killers have never been brought to book because the head of military intelligence under Babangida, Colonel Halilu Akilu, always denied that his staff were involved. Persistent rumours that were never confirmed claimed that the magazine was about to publish reports accusing Mrs. Maryam Babangida of being ‘close’ to international drug peddling networks, (Maringues, 2001)

The Dele Giwa’s murder taught Nigerian journalists hard lesson on hazards of coverage of some kinds of activities in Nigeria. But the coming of terrorism has added another dimension to hazards, the fears, and the dangers which Nigerian journalists should be cautious of in doing their work.

### **Theoretical framework**

The social responsibility theory of the press was chosen as the best theory to give explanation to the phenomenon under the investigation. The theory was a product of the Robert Hutchins-led Commission of 1947 set up in the United States of America on freedom of the mass media. “Social responsibility media theory owes its origin to Hutchins Commission on Freedom of Press, set up in the United States of America in 1947 to re-examine the concept of press freedom as enunciated in the libertarian or free press theory,” (Folarin, 2002, p. 31). The theory



stresses that journalists abused the unlimited freedom which the libertarian theory provided for the mass media. So, the need to bring subtle control over the media was the major reason that gave birth to the theory.

The kind of journalism that was in vogue prior to the advent of social responsibility theory denied the public the privilege of a responsible press. The press was used as an instrument for attack on both the individuals and the society. So, some scholars believe that social responsibility theory emerged as an antidote to the outlined problems. “It is a 20th century theory, which emphasises phrases like “the public’s right to know” and the public responsibility of the press,” (Ojobor, 2002, p. 10). The way journalists failed to manage the unlimited freedom which the libertarian theory offered was captured in the submission that, “the press had abused the extreme freedom which it had been enjoying throughout the centuries when the libertarian theory held sway. By the twentieth century, the press had become irresponsible and the victim of a number of negative practices which culminated in yellow journalism, characterized by sensationalism, irresponsibility, and character assassination,” (Okunna & Omenugha, 2012, p. 204). Any acts of irresponsibility could breed hazards upon a journalist who unleash irresponsible actions on others.

In a nutshell, the social responsibility theory is of the view that the press should carry out the functions of information gathering and dissemination with a sense of responsibility to society. If journalists practice without rationality and sense of responsibility to the people, such could expose them to hazards from any source. It is this point that makes the theory relevant to this study, as Okunna and Omenugha (2012, p.204) argue that social responsibility theory opines that if journalists cannot control themselves, then the government and the people would control them. It goes without saying that an irresponsible press system would make journalists to be prone to more hazards, but a responsible press would help journalists enjoy more protection in an ideal democratic setting. This could be gleaned from the views of some journalists who revealed in this study that the use of tactfulness and skills is part of the strategies they employ to eschew being exposed to hazards.

### **Research Methodology**

The researchers adopted survey as the research method for this study because of the submission that, “whenever the major source of primary data for a study would be the views of members



of the public or any particular group, a survey would be called for,” (Ohaja, 2003, p. 74). The population of this study includes all members of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. The NUJ Abuja Chapter Office in Utako, revealed that, there are about 3,005 (three thousand and five) registered journalists within the FCT. The sample size of the study was 121 and this was drawn using the online Australian Research Sample Size Calculator, where the researchers used a confidence level of 99%, standard error of 0.1. The calculator automatically assesses the population of a given research work and gives a proportionate sample size. Stratified random sampling and simple random sampling were used as the sampling techniques. The researchers adopted stratified random sampling to get the views of the two main grouping of journalists working in the FCT, i.e. (those in private media outfits and those in government-owned media organisations) in the Federal Capital Territory. In addition, simple random sampling was used in the selection of the representative sample for the study. Through simple random sampling the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) and the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) which offices are located in Radio House Area 11 Garki as well as the NUJ Chapels of National Assembly – the Senate and House of Representatives which have journalists drawn from both private and public broadcast and print media outfits were selected. All national television stations, radio stations, newspapers and magazines post their journalists to the National Assembly complex for coverage of the legislature. The questionnaire was adopted in the process of the data collection, as it has been accepted that, “questionnaires are essential to and most directly associated with survey research,” (Babbie, 2007, p. 251). Primary and secondary data were used in this study to add the information collated first hand by the researchers to meet certain research objectives, “in this method of data collection, the researcher or group of researchers are required to go into the field to gather the information that will help prosecute their research investigation,” (Obayi, Anorue, & Onyebuchi, 2016, p. 90). The secondary data used helped to include the information from previous studies.

### Data presentation and interpretation

The researchers collected all the 121 copies of the questionnaire administered and they were all used for the analysis because none of them was wrongly filled.

**Table 3: Respondents’ Age Distribution**

Educational Status	Frequency	Percentages (%)
25 – 35	41	34%



<b>36 – 45</b>	65	54%
<b>46 – 55</b>	15	12%
<b>56 and above</b>	Nil	Nil
<b>Total</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: The researchers ‘survey, 2022**

The data in table three above show that more half of the respondents were found mainly in the age brackets of 36 to 45. It was followed by the respondents in the age brackets of 25 – 35. The simple import of the data presented is that journalism practitioners in Abuja within the time of this study, were those in the peak of their youthfulness. The reason for that fact is probably because of the nature of journalism practice that involves running around to hunt for news, which very aged people may not be able to do very well.

**Table 4: Gender Classification of Respondents**

Sex	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Female	83	69%
Male	38	31%
Total	121	100%

**Source: The researchers ‘survey, 2022**

The data on table 4 above show the male’s reportedly continued dominance of the various aspects of journalism practice in Nigeria. This may not be unconnected with the traditional as well as some of the religious practices in some parts of the country that prohibit women (especially married ones) from involving in some activities.

**Table 5: Respondents’ Marital Status**

Educational Status	Frequency	Percentages (%)
<b>Married</b>	90	75%
<b>Single</b>	22	18%
<b>Divorced</b>	4	3%
<b>Widowed</b>	5	4%
<b>Total</b>	121	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: The researchers survey, 2022**

The data presented on table 5 above show that the married respondents are more in number than the unmarried. The data on table reveal that insignificant number of the respondents studied were divorced. This revelation upholds the significance which Nigerians nay Africans attached to marriage institution.

**Table 6: Classification of Educational Status**

Educational Status	Frequency	Percentages (%)
FSLC/SSSC	Nil	Nil
ND/HND	40	33%
B.A/B.Sc.	51	42%
MA/M.Sc.	30	25%
Others	Nil	Nil
<b>Total</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: The researchers ‘survey, 2022**



The data on table 6 above show that a greater number of the respondents had good qualifications either ND/HND or B.Sc./BA with none having only the lowest educational qualifications (FSLC or SSSC). Perhaps, this is a pointer to the premium interest job employers give to journalists with good educational qualifications and the value the media practitioners add to themselves. The latter or the even the former may be the reasons some journalists go to the extent of getting their postgraduate degrees as seen in the table.

The data gathered further show that 41 respondents standing for (34%) are journalists working in print media. The data also show that 65 respondents which is 54% are journalists that work in broadcast media, while 15 respondents which is 12% are those that work as online journalists.

**Research question number one: What are the hazards that journalists face in Nigeria since the return to civil rule in 1999?**

The above research question was answered with the contents of the question 8 of the questionnaire where 90 journalists, that is, 74% chose the hazards of journalism practice in Nigeria to include: killing, kidnapping, maiming, and physical assaults to media practitioners. In addition to those options, 40 of the respondents that is 34% including those who chose the aforementioned options added other hazards, such as destruction of official working tools. Interestingly, among the options given to the journalists to select from, none of them chose imprisonment of media practitioners as one of the hazards encountered in Nigeria since the return to democracy in 1999. Thus, unlike the military era when many journalists were incarcerated severally in Nigeria, the civil rule scenario in the country is a different case with regard to the use of imprisonment to torture media practitioners.

**Research question number two: What is the most common hazard which journalists encounter in Nigeria within the democratic era?**

The answer to the research question-two above was sought with the question number 9 in the questionnaire, where 70 out of the 121 respondents, that is, 58% chose physical assault to journalists as the most common hazard which media practitioners face in Nigeria. On the other hand, 51 respondents, that is, 42% included destruction of official working gadgets and insult as the most common hazards which journalists encounter in Nigeria.

**Research question number three: What are the measures that journalists adopt to overcome the dangers they encounter in the present democratic era?**

The researchers attempted to proffer answer to the above research question using the question number ten in the questionnaire for the study. In the data gathered, the responses of the



respondents with regard to research question number two above were summarised beneath. In their different opinions in the open-ended question, the respondents summarily revealed that Nigerian journalists apply their skills and the experiences they garnered in their practice to eschew some of the hazards. Precisely, they noted that having known their terrain of practice, they are often very cautious of how they tread in their practice of the profession in Nigeria. Also, some respondents observed that, their media houses used to offer them different kinds of protection to mitigate or avoid some of the avoidable hazards in the practice. Some of the respondents also noted that their media houses sponsor journalists to undergo safety trainings in both local and international workshops for handling hazards in journalism practice.

Some other respondents stated that, the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) provides different assistances including legal aids to members who found themselves in some hazards. The respondents also observed that, NUJ show solidarity to their members that are attacked or harassed in any dimension in the process of their jobs. Some respondents noted that all the aforementioned points boost their morale and sustain their resilience to continue practising journalism in the midst of the daunting challenges. Meanwhile, some other respondents revealed that their personal charisma and reputation as valiant journalists, used to ward off certain possible hazards for them.

### **Discussion on the findings**

The data analysed in this research have revealed the hazards which besiege journalism practice in Nigeria since the country's return to the current civilian rule in 1999. The results showed that there is a bit respite for Nigerian journalists in the current democratic dispensation vis-a-vis the scale of hazards they encounter in the practice. This point was made obvious in the results of this study as journalists agreed that most hazards, they encounter in the military are still in vogue in the practice now except imprisonments. Even the killings of journalists experienced in the military era have not stopped, but rather have taken another dimension in the form of kidnapping which might end in death.

The existence of the hazards as obtained in the military regime was portrayed in the results of research question one of this study. Although the respondents accepted that they face almost the same hazards, they had a consensus that it is safer to practice journalism now than in the military era. This views which the journalists expressed corroborate the general notion that the



worst civilian government is better than the best military regime. It should be pointed out that, there were more oppressive decrees and edicts which the military used to gag the mass media in Nigeria during their era. But in the civilian administration, pro-media legislation like Freedom of Information Laws has been enacted to boost the access of information by media practitioners.

It has been revealed in the study that physical assault is the most common hazard, which Nigerian journalists encounter in their work for the nation. Journalists accepted that the hazards in the practice include killings, kidnappings, maiming and physical assaults to media practitioners, majority of them ranked physical assault as the topmost in the list. It is interesting to observe the inclusion of kidnapping as a hazard in journalism practice which was not in the military era as it is one of the social ills that started within the civilian era in Nigeria.

Whereas there are no cases of imprisonment of journalists as obtainable in the military era, kidnapping has been added as another hazard to the litany of hazards journalists face in Nigeria. It should be recalled that kidnapping came into existence during the civilian administration through the Niger-Delta militants who allegedly used it to press for the negligence of the region. Eventually, the government proffered some kinds of solutions to their demands, and they became assuaged, but the crime of kidnapping keeps on soaring. But how do Nigerian journalists survive in the plethora of hazards that trail the practice in the country? This poser was answered in the results of this study where journalists accepted that they apply their acquired reportorial skills towards escaping the webs of the hazards. Similarly, journalists stated that they exercise caution in the course of their practice to ensure that they were not entrapped in the dangers of the work.

Also, journalists revealed that their media houses used to give them some sorts of protection which was part of the ways they are shielded from the hazards in the practice. They agreed that their media houses also provide them the opportunity to participate in some good safety trainings on how to survive in the pool of hazards in their practice. In addition, media practitioners revealed that the assistances from the Nigeria Union of Journalists was one of the things that give them succour to move on in the practice not minding the hazards.

## **Conclusion**



This work examined the various hazards which Nigerian journalists encounter in the practice of the profession in the country since the emergence of civil rule in 1999. The journalists whose views were examined revealed that regardless of the fact that the nation has been in uninterrupted democratic governance for over twenty years, media practitioners still face several serious hazards. Based on the findings of the study, the researchers recommend that:

1. Nigerian journalism curriculum developers should include courses on safety measures for all institutions or departments that train prospective journalists.
2. Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) should lobby the National Assembly to enact laws making physical assaults to journalists as criminal offences.
3. The NUJ and the owners of media outfits have to lobby the National Assembly to come up with a legislation making kidnapping of journalists specifically as a capital offence.

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