JOURNALISTS PERCEPTION OF PRESS FREEDOM UNDER PRESIDENT BOLA AHMED TINUBU ADMINISTRATION IN ABUJA

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Abstract

Research Problem
Democracy relies on press freedom which allows journalists to report news as well as serve as watchdogs for the activities of the government. However, the Nigerian media has experienced different degrees of censorship and restrictions throughout various administrations, including the Tinubu administration. This study therefore examines the perceptions of Nigerian journalists on press freedom under the President Tinubu led government.

Methods/Theory
The study was quantitative, using survey research method with a sample size of 100, a census sampling technique was used to reach respondents cut across radio, television and newspaper media organizations in Abuja, and the instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire. The study was hinged on authoritarian theory supported by social responsibility theories.

Results
Findings of the study reveal that Nigerian journalists perceive that the Tinubu government restricts press freedom, identifying internal censorship and political intimidation as the primary obstacles to their work, in addition to specific legislative instruments like the Cybercrime Act and the NBC Code and regulations, often viewed as politicised, which all pose threats to journalistic freedom.

Conclusion
Conclusively, Nigerian journalists have a predominantly negative perception of press freedom under the Tinubu-led government, expressing widespread dissatisfaction.
Key contribution to knowledge:
The study contributes to knowledge by providing empirical evidence of Nigerian journalists' experiences and perceptions of press freedom under the Tinubu administration.
Recommendation
It recommends that increased vigilance among journalists, increased institutional safeguards in media organisations and legal changes to frameworks, to ensure that Nigerian media laws are in line with international standards.

Introduction

The pressing issue of journalists and government roles remains particularly relevant for those who face constraints in fulfilling their responsibilities. The practices such as censorship, coercion, strict legislation, and freedom limitations keep posing serious questions regarding the freedom of the press. Nonetheless, the press remains one of the most essential parts of democracy worldwide, thanks to its transparency, accountability, and continuous flow of information. It is essential to underline that the media plays an invaluable role in providing transparency, honesty, and accountability to the government, as it links the people to the activities of the government (Boydstun, 2022). Media not only link politics and the public, but also are involved in the surveillance of socio - economic issues, analysing political processes while monitoring those in power. The media may serve as the prime instrument for disseminating information and knowledge to citizens to inform them to choose representatives intelligently (European Union, 2025; Schriner-Briggs, 2024; Rashidian et al., 2019).

There are different obstacles to the freedom of the press globally, and especially in the context of democratic practices. This issue seems to be getting worse as more and more governments across the world are deploying different forms of censorship, legislation, and strict regulations to stop journalists from doing their work properly. As indicated by Media Rights Agenda (2025), the problem is at its highest level in countries where the government controls the territory most or where the political climate is extremely volatile. Although there are clauses in the constitutions of African countries regarding the right to free speech, the media business faces many obstacles. Further, the constitution and the wide powers vested in the police and intelligence agencies often render weak the institutions that are meant to protect media freedom (Danso et al., 2025; Chama et al., 2020).

The issue of press freedom, media regulation, and the ties between governments and the media has already been extensively explored in other parts of the world. The scholars have undertaken various studies related to censorship, safety of journalists, ownership issues, political influence, and the role of law in media practice. Researchers have conducted some studies in the Nigerian context, focusing on press freedom issues in both former military and democratic governments. The following studies have recorded incidents of harassment, intimidation, restrictive laws, and government efforts to manipulate the media. Although these studies have added immensely to the understanding of press freedom in Nigeria, the majority of them were done before the advent of the Bola

Ahmed Tinubu administration. Thus, it is difficult to obtain empirical evidence about the situation of press freedom faced by journalists themselves under the government.

It should be noted that while several media rights organisations have reported on incidents of attacks on and violations of journalists, little has been reported on the journalists' own perceptions of the media environment and the factors influencing their perceptions. This situation creates a gap in the literature that requires attention. Up until now, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu has been perceived as a supporter of press freedom, as he stated in his inaugural speech and interactions with the media in Nigeria that press freedom is a crucial component of democracy (Ijioma, 2024). It was abundantly clear that a media crackdown had begun, however, during Bola Tinubu's first year in office. As reported by the Center for Journalism Innovation and Development (CJID), they recorded thirty-seven (37) cases of harassment, arrests, and intimidation of journalists in Nigeria between May 2023 and May 2024 (Premium Times, 2024).

Other reports from media rights organisations and watchdogs suggest a decline in press freedom during the first year of his administration. With all of these developments, this research paper examined the perception of press freedom under President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's (PBAT) administration in Nigeria to contribute to the existing knowledge about press freedom and offer an overview of the media repression cases in Nigeria, as well as an understanding of the journalists' views regarding press freedom in the contemporary Nigerian environment.

Growing concerns about the safety of journalists and the increasing restrictions on media practice in Nigeria have raised questions about the extent to which press freedom is being protected under the current democratic dispensation. Despite the increasing global efforts to protect journalists, journalism continues to be a perilous profession. As underlined by UNESCO (2022), events have recently highlighted the role of journalism in the dissemination of free access information and the threats against those who practice journalism, as much against old but well-known threats as against the emergence of new threats. Nevertheless, it appears that reporters are increasingly being harassed, especially in their reporting on protests and demonstrations, as they may face aggression from various parties, including both security services and demonstrators. According to Staff (2024), the problem has even become more complicated because of the application of restrictive legal instruments that make it possible to prosecute people for their actions online, thus allowing the government to arrest the reporters for any reason.

Similarly, recent reports indicate that attacks on journalists have significantly impacted several states in Nigeria. According to Adurokiya (2024), among the 16 most affected states in Nigeria are Lagos, Kaduna, and Rivers, and while there are many other states in the bigger report, these three recurrently featured in the report. Adurokiya (2024) clarified that the types of assaults vary from bullying and harassment to unlawful arrest, corporal assaults, and even incidents that involved firearms or life threats. In addition, the Nigerian press context is characterised as one of the most dangerous contexts in the region of West Africa for its media activists (Reporters Without Borders, 2024). Nevertheless, even though civil organisations and groups focused on media are actively working on the record and registration of those attacks on journalists, there is still a void in proper investigation of Nigerian journalists' opinions and perceptions of these hard scenarios; therefore, the study herein examined perceptions of Nigerian journalists regarding freedom of the press under the

current administration of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu.

This study explores the perceptions of Nigerian journalists' on press freedom under President Bola Tinubu's administration, with the following specific objectives which seek to:

1. assess Nigerian journalists' perceptions of press freedom under the administration of Bola Ahmed Tinubu, with particular reference to censorship, intimidation, and their influence on journalistic content and editorial decisions.
2. 2. examine journalists' perceptions of the impact of government laws, policies, and media regulatory bodies such as the National Broadcasting Commission on press freedom in Nigeria under the Tinubu administration.

Conceptual Clarification

Two key concepts: press freedom and perception of journalists, are discussed in this section.

Press Freedom

Press freedom, which people refer to as freedom of the press or media freedom, serves as an essential foundation for democratic societies because it enables public access to information, which helps maintain governmental transparency and public accountability and creates an informed citizenry. The law gives media organisations and journalists the right to collect and distribute news without facing illegal government or corporate or major power entity censorship (UNESCO, 2022). The basic right which people have to share information through any means and receive information from all sources between countries stands secure because Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights protects this right (UNESCO, 2022). Essentially, press freedom entails the idea that the journalist must report independently from the outside influences, such as those related to the law, politics, and economics, that push, pull, and force their work.

Press freedom includes the protection of journalists legally, as well as the environment in which they operate (Reporters Without Borders, 2024). The current academic debates on the issue of press freedom focus on the dual nature of the concept: it has both a legal and a real form. From a legal perspective, many countries protect the right to media freedom in their legislation, including constitutional laws. Nevertheless, the reality that many journalists face may not match the legal provisions that protect the right to press freedom.

Journalists' Perception

Press freedom and the conditions for media workers depend on journalists' understanding of their profession and their roles within it. It explains how journalists interpret the environment in which they carry out their duties every day. Journalists do not only depend on laws that promise freedom of expression. They also rely on their daily experiences while gathering information and reporting events in society. In their situation, their perception is partially affected by the way these governmental institutions behave towards them and how easy it is for them to obtain information. Journalists develop their perception through three factors: safety, professional independence, and organisational support. Journalists achieve better work performance when they receive protection and respect from their work environment. However, experiencing pressure or intimidation can lead to a decline in their confidence. According to scholars, the explanation is that press freedom is usually evaluated by what a journalist experiences, rather than what is contained in a document or a policy. This implies that perception is a key aspect in understanding the

real situation in a country regarding the media (Emelife, 2025).

Journalists' interaction with the government and law enforcement institutions also plays a role in forming perceptions regarding the environment. If the interaction is cordial, the journalist feels free to report, but if there is a delay in the process, the journalist may perceive the environment as adverse. Studies have found a strong correlation between the perception of the journalist and the effectiveness of the laws in real-life situations. This aspect explains why perception is widely discussed in research on press freedom and media practice in Nigeria (Emelife, 2025). In addition, the perception of journalists is a result of their interaction with the authorities and institutions that are responsible for enforcing laws. If they feel that these institutions are on their side, they can have a positive perception. Their perception might shift when the opposite happens. This clearly demonstrates how the perception of journalists evolves progressively through their experiences, but very slowly. It also helps to understand the importance of the analysis of their perception in understanding the prevailing media landscape in Nigeria (Media Rights Agenda, 2025).

Theoretical Framework

The study is hinged on the authoritarian theory supported by the social responsibility theory.

Authoritarian Theory

Authoritarian theory was formulated by Fred S. Siebert, Theodore Peterson, and Wilbur Schramm in 1956. It is a theory of a media system dominated by the government with the purpose of upholding political stability, social order, and conformity with government policies. According to the theory, although too much media freedom can be a threat to public order, it is the task of the government to define the limits of public communication. Hence, it is expected that the press operates within the specific boundaries defined by the state through licensing, censorship, and other forms of control (Oluwasola, 2020; DeFleur & DeFleur, 2016). However, it can be stated that the theory still has its value as it provides a conceptual framework for understanding those situations when the state defines the operation of the media through legislation, regulation, financial coercion, intimidation, or surveillance (Przeworski, 2023).

It could be noted that some contemporary scholars use the same theoretical framework to analyse how states control media in democratic and nondemocratic countries (Muller, 2021). Consequently, the framework was criticised for viewing the dynamics between media and state power in a one-directional manner. That means the framework presupposes almost complete government power over information but pays little attention to the role of journalists, CSOs, digital technologies, and citizens, especially their power to challenge that control. In today's media landscape, the flow of information goes beyond traditional media structures. Social media, citizen journalism, and digital technologies offer new channels for disseminating information despite the efforts of the government to restrain its circulation. Hence, some of the presumptions of the framework appear to be inappropriate to explain the realities of modern media (Oluwasola, 2020).

Another limitation is that the theory tends to interpret media restrictions mainly as direct state actions. In reality, media freedom can be restricted through other forms of tactics, such as concentration of ownership, use of patronage from politicians, withdrawal of advertisements, or economic dependency on other strong individuals. The implication here is that modern democracies may also exert

media control through political and economic measures, and not just by using censorship. Consequently, this research is not conducted through the use of authoritarian theory without any criticism, but it has been adopted in an attempt to ascertain whether journalists perceive the activities of the government and politics to be inhibiting their press freedom during the Tinubu administration.

Social Responsibility Theory

The Hutchins Commission on Freedom of the Press in 1947 resulted in the notion of social responsibility theory, which was formalised by Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm afterwards. Essentially, the theory suggests that media freedom must also encompass unavoidable social responsibilities. Or, simply speaking, the theory implies that media must provide objective and balanced information and the proper context. Media must present diverse opinions and, at the same time, provoke public debate. Moreover, media activities must meet certain professional and ethical standards (Umoren & Akpan, 2023; Muller, 2021). This approach's strength is that it implies the link between media freedom and accountability. Journalists act as independent observers, but they also bear some responsibility towards the public interest. Thus, the theory is relevant when it comes to media ethics and professionalism as well as democratic governance (Muller, 2021).

Despite all these strengths, the social responsibility theory remains prone to criticism as well. Several researchers point out that the interpretation of the concept of "responsibility" varies between governments, media corporations, and journalists. While one group may consider a particular journalism style responsible, another group may perceive it as biased, damaging, or politically motivated. Such ambiguity provides a reason for the governments to justify the existence of regulations on media, which appear to be simply "assisting" to promote responsibility or protect national interests. Another assumption that comes with the theory is that media institutions can regulate themselves due to their independence and economic stability. However, such an assumption may prove unrealistic when applied to developing democracies, such as Nigeria, where media corporations experience financial stress and political influence and ownership pressures, as well as the necessity to rely on governmental advertising. In these conditions, it is challenging to achieve self-regulation, thus making it more theoretical than practical (Umoren & Akpan, 2023; Muller, 2021).

In other words, the claims concerning the viability of morality as a shield for media freedom have been appropriately evaluated. Responsible journalism is important, but it can only be effective if journalists are given an environment where they can exercise their social responsibilities without undue interference, without fear, and without a lack of independence. The study thus concludes that the issue of media responsibility and media freedom is not mutually exclusive but complementary. The study adopts both theories because combined, they provide a more comprehensive explanation of the phenomenon under investigation. The authoritarian theory explains how political and institutional interests can restrict media freedom, while the social responsibility theory highlights the democratic obligations of journalists and media organisations.

Perceptions of Press Freedom under the Tinubu Administration

The issue of press freedom under President Bola Ahmed Tinubu has lately attracted scholarly and public attention, primarily due to its implications for the functioning of the democratic governance and accountability mechanism in Nigeria. However, even though the government keeps emphasising its support

for media freedom, recent studies seem to reveal that the realities of journalists' activities do not entirely correspond with the claims made. Thus, it becomes necessary to analyse the perception of press freedom in depth in the context of the Nigerian media environment in question. According to the State House (2023), the celebration of the 2023 World Press Freedom Day was marked by the repeated assurances of government officials regarding the need to ensure the protection of journalists' rights and promotion of independent journalism. Such a position is designed to demonstrate that the government is really committed to press freedom.

However, one cannot consider the statements issued by government officials to be factual proof of press freedom. As a result, scholars can understand the real meaning of such a position only by juxtaposing the statements with the activities of journalists (Media Rights Agenda, 2024). With the official narrative being one of a positive attitude towards freedom of the press, this present study is needed to provide a different perspective, with the results from the Media Rights Agenda showing otherwise. This creates a question of whether or not the freedom of the press really exists in Nigeria, especially when comparing the two scenarios. On the other hand, there is also the issue of the Tinubu administration, which has indirectly impacted the media in which the government promotes state-owned media, while on the other hand, it fosters an environment whereby independent media can be punished for criticising the ruling class. The essence of this perspective lies in providing other means of restricting the media apart from the traditional ones of direct censorship, but rather through indirect policies and institutions, such as state media.

The role of the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) has also received considerable attention in the literature. The role of the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) in the situation has attracted considerable attention from the literature as well. According to Egbu (2024), the commission has already taken steps and sanctioned broadcast stations regarding their alleged unethical reporting. Nevertheless, the question remains whether such sanctions are applied in an unbiased and independent manner, even though regulation is necessary for all media institutions. The actions of the NBC may gradually affect the perception of the journalists regarding the independence of media regulation if the journalists perceive it as politically motivated. Therefore, it is not only about regulation but also about how it is done. The regulation of the digital media space is another growing topic in the literature.

In more recent times, there has been increasing worry over the harassment of bloggers, online reporters, and social media activists (Tope 2024) by different security agencies. The situation is especially worrisome considering the fact that the issues around the freedom of the press are no longer only about traditional media but digital ones, which are avenues through which information can be shared but which have brought new kinds of control. It is imperative to state here that the issues around the freedom of the press in Nigeria cannot be discussed without taking into account the challenges facing the new digital medium. The extant literature demonstrates that journalists continue to face a lot of challenges as reported in and reported on in relation to regulations and policies that affect the operation of the media organisations and press officers. However, there is very little written on the issues journalists perceive as those related to press freedom – most of the scholarly work focuses on instances of the government's interference, surveillance, regulations, harassment, media, and policy.

This current study, therefore, seeks to go beyond the discussion of press freedom

violations and to understand journalists' perspectives on how they perceive press freedom under President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's administration. The study intends to provide empirical evidence by looking at the lived experience and perspective of media personnel and their engagement with the wider context of press freedom under the Tinubu-led government.

Censorship, Intimidation, and Their Influence on Journalism

Intimidation and censorship have been identified as one of the factors that seriously disrupt the practice of journalism in Nigeria on a continuous daily basis. While government officials tend to claim that the press is free, organisations that monitor media freedom offer an alternative perspective. The World Press Freedom Index clearly indicates cases of interference, especially during election times and other human rights advocacies. Security agencies have been involved in arrests, threats, and physical attacks against journalists. Arbitrary punitive measures promote self-censorship, as well as avoidance of certain issues. Civil society organisations assert that a culture of intimidation results in a lack of support for investigative journalism and leaves the public uninformed. The editors walk on eggshells so that they do not attract fines, suspensions, or other punitive measures. The government denounced suppression of the protests, but the journalists are still not safe. In general, both direct threats and structural pressures affect the content of the editorials and the news itself. Intimidation and censorship are great concerns to journalists and media organisations (Reporters Without Borders, 2024; Human Rights Watch, 2024; Amos, 2024).

What is even worse is that more subtle forms of censorship become prevalent, as well. Government officials arrest journalists and detain them, alleging their violations related to cybercrimes such as posting offensive comments on the web, for example. The Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention) Act becomes applicable, serving as a general term, while at the same time remaining poorly defined and ambiguous. The law allows government officials to refer to the act as an excuse for maintaining law and order and to intimidate journalists in the process. The authorities often threaten and discourage media professionals from airing content critical of government officials. Such behaviour requires media professionals to practice self-censorship to avoid legal and professional consequences. Investigative journalism becomes a victim of this practice, affecting the reporting of governance failures. The advocacy for law reforms to ensure the freedom of expression has gained momentum. The pressure on media professionals to practice self-censorship affects the format of media reports and how the public consumes media content. Intimidation and censorship of media professionals have continued to be crucial concerns for freedom of the Nigerian media (The Alvin Report, 2025; Amos, 2024; Onyekwelu, 2024).

A close examination of the literature reveals a dominant theme that, in most cases, seems to be the repetition of similar aspects. Most researchers generally agree that censorship and intimidation still play an important role in influencing journalism practices in Nigeria physically, legally, and institutionally. Nonetheless, the literature tends to focus more on reported incidents and legislative developments, so that less attention is paid to how journalists themselves interpret the same experiences and their effect on press freedom. In light of that, there emerges a clear research gap with regard to the inward or subjective aspect of media practitioners. This gap, therefore, implies that this study adds knowledge by examining journalists' perceptions of censorship and intimidation in the Tinubu administration. In other words, it

seeks to understand how journalists perceive these influences and how they affect professional practice. It, therefore, explores the connection between media freedom and state power in modern-day Nigeria.

Legal and Policy Framework Affecting Press Freedom

The main issue of the Cybercrimes (Prohibition and Prevention) Act, amended in 2024, instills fear in media professionals. The vague language in the law has been cited as a reason for the arrest of journalists on grounds of "offensive" or "annoying" content on the internet. Media rights groups, such as SERAP and the Nigeria Guild of Editors, have urged responsible use of the law. Fear of legal consequences is a murky area that discourages and creates uncertainty among journalists. Many journalists perceive the provisions in the law as a threat to press freedom, despite their intention to curb harmful online activities. The legal climate in Nigeria can affect the freedom of the press, and media regulatory systems can have an impact on journalists' views of freedom. The requirements of the content are stipulated by the NBC code and regulations in all the media platforms, including radio, television, and online digital materials; the NBC denotes the National Broadcasting Commission that deals with the standards of broadcasting in Nigeria (SERAP & NGE, 2025; Abdulkareem, 2025).

The Official Secrets Act is more of a law that has the capacity to create legal issues for journalists who reveal certain classes of confidential news. Such legislation has created a dilemma for journalists, forcing them to choose between truth-telling and the fear of repercussions. People have cited legal frameworks, designed to promote order, as limiting the freedom of the press. Experts have raised the necessity of adjusting laws to harmonise the legal frameworks of different countries with international laws, aiming to protect the safety of journalists and democracy as a whole (SERAP & NGE, 2025; Abdulkareem, 2025). It must be pointed out that, while most of the literature available focuses on the law itself and advocacy group issues, less attention has been paid to how journalists view these laws and how they affect their work. This is a significant lack in the literature. Thus, the study contributes to the existing literature by exploring the perspective and experiences of journalists regarding the impact of legal restrictions on press freedom, professional autonomy, and democratic accountability in Nigeria today.

Role of Media Regulatory Bodies in Press Freedom

Media regulatory bodies, especially NBC, have a tremendous impact on press freedom in Nigeria. Media houses do not address sensitive issues since they are operating within regulations. To prevent the imposition of fines and suspension of licences, they are very keen on content assessment. Although NBC argues about promoting professionalism, the journalists believe that the influence that NBC has on media houses curbs their freedom. Such pressure affects the law and the conduct of journalists (Onyekwelu, 2024). NBC is mandated with the control and monitoring of the airing of media content through the medium of air, which covers radio, television, and internet media. Nevertheless, media experts believe that the rules are too harsh and, in certain instances, politically inclined. The government has punished the media houses for their critical coverage of its activities.

The general population feels that the implementation of NBC rules can be considered censorship. Additionally, human rights organisations have complained about the lack of transparency and consistency in NBC's actions. Media houses are not talking about sensitive things since they are acting in line with regulations. They analyse their content

since they must not face fines or license suspensions. NBC may discuss professionalism, but the real implication, as far as media organisations are concerned, is that it does not allow journalists to work independently. The research indicates that legal compliance and the rules of a code of conduct for journalists are two mechanisms that influence their work (Onyekwelu, 2024).

Regulations in legal affairs impact the operation of journalists in the field. The reporters of the NBC news channel exercise self-censorship since they would rather not face penalties from the network, but they are still capable of reporting on critical news. The NBC Act, along with its regulations, allows broadcasters to decide on which content they will air to their listeners and viewers. The government can also exercise its mandate during elections and other political emergencies to stop critical news coverage from reaching the masses. Thus, journalists constantly balance between their duty to inform the public and their need to protect themselves from fines, suspension, and licence revocation. Over time, such ethical and social pressures result in the decay of investigative reporting and less criticism (Abdulkareem, 2025; SERAP, 2025; Onyekwelu, 2024). But a literature search also indicates that some researchers believe that there is self-regulation in the media agencies.

To date, research has focused mainly on the activities, functions, and decisions of regulatory bodies. Researchers have largely ignored the perceptions of reporters regarding the role of the regulatory bodies and their effects on professional behaviour as well as overall perceptions of press freedom. This is a gap worth mentioning. Therefore, this study relies on previous research but focuses specifically on journalists' perceptions of the role of media regulatory bodies in creating a climate for press freedom in Nigeria under the Tinubu administration.

Research Methodology

This was a quantitative study that utilized survey research method to examine how journalists perceive press freedom under President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's administration. The survey method is considered ideal for examining quantifiable elements (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The population of the study was 100 registered practicing journalists according to Nigerian Union of Journalists, Abuja Chapter (2025), consisting of professional journalists working in Abuja and operating in various mediums of information dissemination. Abuja was selected because it houses most national media organisations, press offices, and journalism associations. The sample size for the study was 100 determined by applying census sampling, while the instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire, using a 5-point likert-scale format, allowing participants to indicate the degree of agreement or disagreement with statements, giving them comprehensive information about their perceptions. The data was analysed using SPSS Version 26. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and tables, were used to summarise the participants' demographics and survey responses. The analysis enabled identification of patterns in journalists' perceptions and highlighted areas where press freedom is perceived to be under pressure in Abuja.

Data Analysis

To achieve the objectives of this research, which investigated the perception of Nigerian journalists regarding press freedom under President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, 100 journalists were selected from print, broadcast, and online media sectors to respond to the copies of the questionnaire administered, however, only 93 journalists participated in the survey, owing to some limitations in the availability of the

remaining 7 journalists. The results are presented below.

Table 1: Summary of respondents' demography

Demographic Data	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	40	43
	Male	53	57
	Total	93	100
Age	18–25	8	9
	26–35	34	37
	36–45	27	29
	46–55	16	17
	56 and above	7	7
	Total	93	100
Years of Journalistic Experience	Less than 1 year	8	9
	1–5 years	31	33
	6–10 years	34	37
	More than 10 years	20	21
	Total	93	100
Type of Media Organisation	Multimedia	12	13
	Online/Digital	21	23
	Print	33	35
	Broadcast (TV & Radio)	27	29
	Total	93	100

Table 1 provides a demographic analysis of the journalists giving insights into their qualifications to participate in the survey. The gender distribution of respondents shows an almost equal representation of both male and female journalists, with 57% of the respondents being male and 43% being female, which indicates that both genders are adequately represented. The age distribution of the journalists also indicates that the majority of them are 26-35 (37%) and 36-45 (29%) years respectively, implying they are old enough and active to understand the issues of press freedom. Similarly, 37% of the respondents have 6–10 years of experience and 33% have 1–5 years, indicating that respondents cut across both mid-career and early-career professionals. This variety is important for the study because it ensures that the results reflect different views shaped by different levels of experience with the media environment and interactions with government rules or pressure. Also the media organization represented cut across the print (35%), broadcast (29%), online/digital (23%), and multimedia (13%) respectively, implying that the study captures various media platforms. This diversity is necessary in the study since the experiences of censorship and the freedom of the press vary according to different types of media, which are used to assist the researchers in identifying the barriers and limitations that are faced by journalists.

Table 2: Respondents' description of the current state of press freedom in Nigeria

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very Low	27	29%
Low	21	23%
Moderate	18	19%
High	16	17%
Very High	11	12%
Total	93	100

Data in Table 2 above shows that the highest proportion of respondents, 29%, rated press freedom as very low, indicating that a considerable number of journalists perceive serious limitations in the current media environment, while only 12%, rated press freedom very high. The implication of this result suggests a general sense of constraint among media practitioners regarding their ability to operate freely in Nigeria under the current administration.

Table 3: Respondents' comparison of press freedom under previous administrations and the Tinubu administration

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Much Worse	34	37
Slightly Worse	21	23
About the Same	16	17
Slightly Better	12	13
Much Better	10	11
Total	93	100

Data in Table 3 show that 37% of respondents indicated that press freedom is much worse under the Tinubu administration than in previous administrations, implying that a large number of journalists believe their ability to operate freely has decreased. However, a small percentage of respondents (11%) perceive actual progress in this matter. These findings reveal that a significant number of journalists believe the media environment has worsened rather than improved as their perceived level of freedom of the press under President Tinubu is generally negative.

Table 4: Respondents who have experienced censorship in their organisations when covering stories

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	55	59
No	38	41
Total	93	100

Table 4 shows that 59% of respondents have experienced censorship within their organization when covering stories. However, 41% of the respondents indicate that they have

not experienced censorship, which is a significant number as well. This implies that journalists face work-related restrictions and that censorship could be a common phenomenon in the media institutions.

Table 5: Respondents' views on frequency of political pressure affecting editorial decisions

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Always	19	20
Often	25	27
Occasionally	21	23
Rarely	16	17
Never	12	13
Total	93	100

Table 5 reveals that political pressure often affects editorial decisions as indicated by 27%. Contrarily however, 13% of the respondents do not agree that political pressure affects editorial decisions. This suggests that although some journalists perceive political influence as a recurring issue in editorial decisions that can hamper editorial independence, the perception is not unanimous.

Table 6: Respondents' awareness of specific laws or policies under the Tinubu administration that negatively impact press freedom

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	64	69%
No	29	31%
Total	93	100

Data in the Table 6 reveals that 69% of respondents are aware of particular laws or policies under the Tinubu administration that have a negative impact on press freedom. On the other hand, 31% indicate that they are not aware of such laws or policies. This indicates that being aware of these laws and policies can make journalists feel restricted in the discharge of their duties.

Table 7: Laws or Policies under the Tinubu Administration Considered Most Restrictive for Press Freedom (Only respondents who answered "Yes" in Table 6 responded to this question)

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Cybercrime Act	21	33
NBC Code	15	23
Terrorism (Prevention) Act	10	15
Digital Surveillance Policies	15	23%
Others	3	5
Total	64	100

Results in Table 7 shows that 33% of the respondents identify the Cybercrime Act as the most restrictive law on press freedom, implying that journalists perceive the Cybercrime Act as a major limiting factor on their work, reinforcing the notion that reduced press freedom can be linked to identifiable policy frameworks. Another law identified by 23% of the respondents is the digital surveillance policies which also put limitations to press freedom under the Tinubu administration.

Table 8: Journalists' perception of the role of regulatory bodies such as the NBC in relation to press freedom

Statement	SA	A	N	SD	D
1. The NBC and similar bodies act as neutral regulators of media content.	10 (11%)	16 (17%)	18 (19%)	25 (27%)	24 (27%)
2. Regulatory bodies are sometimes used to suppress critical journalism.	40 (43%)	27 (29%)	12 (13%)	7 (7%)	7 (7%)
3. Sanctions by regulatory bodies under the Tinubu administration have limited press freedom.	31 (33%)	27 (29%)	16 (17%)	12 (13%)	7 (7%)
4. The actions of NBC are politically influenced.	36 (39%)	25 (27%)	16 (17%)	10 (11%)	6 (7%)
5. NBC promotes professionalism and ethics in Nigerian journalism.	12 (13%)	18 (19%)	16 (17%)	27 (29%)	20 (21%)
6. Regulatory decisions by NBC discourage objective reporting.	34 (37%)	25 (27%)	18 (19%)	10 (11%)	6 (7%)

Data from Table 8 reveal that 27% of respondents disagree and strongly disagree respectively, that the NBC acts as a neutral regulatory body. This result suggests that respondents widely question neutrality. In addition, 43% of the respondents strongly agree that regulatory bodies suppress critical journalism, indicating a strong perception that regulation may be used as a tool of suppression. Also data above reveal that 33% strongly agree that sanctions by regulatory bodies under the Tinubu administration have limited press freedom, and a significant number, 39%, strongly agree that the actions of NBC are politically influenced. In contrast however, 29%, strongly disagree that NBC promotes professionalism and ethics in Nigerian journalism and 37% strongly agree that regulatory decisions by NBC discourage objective reporting.

These findings indicate that journalists' concerns extend beyond general political pressure to include the actions and decisions of regulatory bodies, strengthening the argument that institutional regulation has a major effect on the current media environment under the Tinubu administration.

Discussion of Findings

This study examined the perception of press freedom under President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's (PBAT) administration in Nigeria. The study found that the perception of press freedom among Nigerian journalists during the Tinubu era is mainly negative, as around 60% of the sampled Nigerian journalists perceive press freedom as either very low or low, thus showing a general dissatisfaction with freedom of expression. More importantly, most respondents indicated that the state of affairs is worse than that of previous administrations. This general perception tends to validate the authoritarianism theory, which suggests that in some political environments, the ruling class manipulates the media systems either overtly or covertly (DeFleur & DeFleur, 2016). Further, it aligns well with McNair's (2017) theory, in which he explains that the acceptable expressions of individuals in such systems are determined by government officials either through regulations or political manoeuvres. However, it does not conform to the social responsibility theory, which holds that the media should safeguard its independence, abide by ethical standards, and provide a platform for airing various perspectives in line with the interests of the masses (Tayo-Garbson et al., 2021). However, the results of this research show that this ideal is not being fully realised in the current political climate in Nigeria, as Uzuegbunam (2015) found that journalists are unable to report on sensitive political issues as pressures from inside and outside continue to affect press freedom.

Another major finding of the study indicates that there is censorship and intimidation that have a significant impact on the content and editorial decisions of the journalists in the Tinubu administration. Most respondents (59%) said they had faced censorship in their organisations regarding topics that were of political concern, meaning that a large number of organisations have some form of editorial control. In addition, 71% of the journalists admitted that political pressure influences their editorial decisions. External political factors often and significantly influence media narratives. The results support the claim made by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) about the threat of harassment, intimidation, and surveillance to the Nigerian press, as indicated by Uwalaka & Amadi (2023); and this finding is consistent with the claim made by Omojunikanbi (2024) that such policies negatively affect the role and function of the press as watchdogs of society.

In addition, the study also found that the existence of certain legislative acts, policies, and regulations adopted during President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's administration was regarded as an important barrier to the freedom of the press. The Cybercrime Act alone was responsible for 33% of the barriers to press freedom in this study, the NBC Code for 23%, and the digital surveillance policy for 21%. These findings support the Premium Times (2024) editorial pieces aimed at certain legislative acts, policies, and regulations about the press under the administration of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu. It was noted that acts and directives did not go unnoticed and significantly hindered the work of genuine investigative journalism, particularly in the areas of corruption in high places, governance, and national security. The findings in this study are in line with the information from Amnesty International (2022) that the issue of digital surveillance is increasingly becoming a

matter of concern globally, as governments are currently using the Internet to spy on journalists in the name of national security. Thus, this finding is in agreement with studies that have previously indicated that repression is a perennial impediment to the work of journalism in Nigeria (Onuche, 2021), with numerous journalists opting for the practice of self-censorship and refraining from any politically sensitive topics of discussion that might result in lingering litigation and harassment (Olomide, 2020).

Finally, the findings reveal significant journalists' scepticism about the role of the NBC in ensuring press freedom under the Tinubu administration, as a majority of journalists in Nigeria perceive the NBC as politically influenced and used to suppress critical journalism. This finding corroborates the critique of NBC by Adibe et al. (2017), who argued that political manipulation has a way of slowly eroding the independence of the NBC. It was further stated that these tendencies always cast doubt on the effectiveness of the institution itself and on its neutrality in acting as a mere neutral arbiter of media ethics. Furthermore, whenever any regulatory policy is considered punitive in nature, it not only adversely affects the process but also limits press freedom and damages the entire credibility of the media system as well. This finding also corroborates the theory that the current form of regulation has an effect of nurturing authoritarianism and failing to create a socially responsible media environment. All these findings seem to clearly indicate the degradation of press freedom in Nigeria under the Tinubu government. In addition, this study supports the arguments by McQuail & Deuze (2020), wherein, through an analysis of authoritarianism and social responsibility theory, it can be understood that journalists have many institutional, political, and legal constraints that hamper their autonomy and responsibility (The Alvin Report, 2025).

Conclusion

The conclusions drawn from the findings of this study indicate that Nigerian journalists have an overall negative attitude towards press freedom under President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, owing to the issues of censorship and intimidation that are fairly widespread in the current administration, which affects journalistic content creation as well as editorial decisions. This lends a strong support for the Authoritarian Theory, which argues that the media is often subjected to state control and used as instruments of political power, while challenging the assumptions of Social Responsibility Theory, which posits that media regulation should promote ethical journalism while preserving freedom and public accountability, because in the Nigerian context, instead of fostering responsibility, journalists perceive regulatory institutions as instruments of political suppression.

Additionally, journalists expressed scepticism towards certain legislation and regulatory approaches, including the NCybercrime Act and the NBC Code, noting that many of them view these measures as politically motivated and more frequently used to stifle dissent rather than to support professional journalism practices. Collectively, the results obtained point out that press freedom in Nigeria under President Bola Ahmed Tinubu raises serious concerns for journalists' right to report freely. Overall, these findings affirm previous studies which also found that press freedom in Nigeria continues to be undermined by state interference, harassment, and restrictive policies, despite democratic transitions, and confirms that legal frameworks are frequently weaponized against journalists. However, it differs from previous studies because it situates concerns within the Tinubu-led administration, while raising critical questions about the Nigeria's commitment to democratic media governance.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are proposed based on the findings of this research.

1. Journalists must be wary of censorship, take note of instances where their work is suppressed or altered, and report these incidents to the relevant authorities or media watchdog bodies.
2. Journalists should seek the backing of their media houses and professional organisations in facing censorship, intimidation, or harassment.
3. Journalists should create networks and collaborate with other journalists, media organisations and civil society groups to support each other in the cause for press freedom.
4. There is an urgent need for the Nigerian government to review and amend some of the laws, such as the Cybercrime Act and the NBC Code, by removing clauses that hinder press freedom and bringing them in line with international standards on freedom of expression.

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