

Social Media Regulation, Freedom of Expression, and Civic Space in Nigeria: A Study Based on Authoritarian Mass Communication Theory

Journal of Government and Political Issues
Volume 2, Issue 3, November 2022 (126-136)
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DOI: 10.53341/jgpi.v2i3.69

journal.mengeja.id/index.php/JGPI/index

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of the digital revolution on freedom of expression and civic space in Nigeria, particularly examining the role of social media regulation in the country's shift towards autocratization. Employing secondary data sources, the research focuses on key variables, including the government's approach to online content regulation, social media shutdowns, and capacity to regulate online content. The analysis reveals that the government's attempts to control the new media space go beyond silencing the press to outright repression, leading Nigeria towards authoritarianism characterized by reactionary tendencies. Moreover, the study finds that the combination of excessive social media regulation, a suppressed judiciary, and a weakened legislature may result in authoritarian rule in Nigeria. The paper concludes that disobedience to court orders and the use of state institutions against political opposition contribute to the erosion of democracy, highlighting the importance of a balanced approach to social media regulation to protect freedom of expression and maintain a democratic society.

Keywords

social media regulation; digitalization; repression; gagging of the press; rule of law; autocratization; Nigeria

Introduction

Advancements in information communications and technologies (ICTs) have occasioned a borderless world upon click of buttons using highly moderated technological innovations. Digitalization and social networking in their spectres have heightened socio-cultural globalization especially in spread of information, events and news regarding social welfare of citizens and demands for accountability from governments ([Jimada, 2019](#); [Olaniran & Williams, 2020](#)). The spate of social media virality transmits both educative, informative, entertaining and menacing information in forms of audio-visuals and graphics to citizens and governments of developed and developing countries. Massive use of the new media via such social networking apps as Blogs, Instablogs, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, WhatsApp, Telegram among others have granted people relative vents for expression and association. The social media has indeed opened up a new vista of instant cum simultaneous communication reach that is fast awakening the consciousness of the people who until now were accustomed to overtly regulated conventional media. Studies have shown that social media sites are more politically diverse than face-to-face settings ([Baek, Wojcieszak, & Delli Carpini, 2012](#); [Bakshy, Messing, & Adamic, 2015](#)) and as such offer spaces for marginalized groups to express their grievances ([Bekafigo & McBride, 2013](#)). This underscores the importance of social media to mortgaged freedom of expression and the media vis-à-vis the quality of democracy.

The use of social media platforms for political expression has bolstered the study of social and political communication and discussions ([Velasquez & Rojas, 2017](#)). Political expressions on social media thus impact enormously on socio-political behaviours in forms of electioneering campaigns, political

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mobilization and electoral participation ([Khalyubi & Perdana, 2021](#); [Oyekanmi & Rosenje, 2022](#)). The power of social media messages rest majorly on their ability to instantly and simultaneously reach a wide, diverse audience, possibly shaping their thinking and disposition as well as reaction to situations and events. While the public has overtime become accustomed to the regulation of conventional media like the Radio, Television and Print media establishments by government regulatory agencies, the idea of regulating social media; a space which many users consider to be the major avenue to air their unhindered views, is one that has generated a lot of mixed feelings globally.

In Nigeria, discussions and attempts at social media restriction are not uncommon. Restriction of internet use and the social media in Nigeria dates back to 2015, during President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan administration, when the Cybercrime (Prohibition, Prevention etc) was adopted in May 2015 ([Affoah, 2018](#)). The Law among other things addresses threats to cyberspaces including internet usage and safety with regard to prevention, prohibition and combating cybercrimes. The craving for internet and social media censorship developed further in 2019 when President Muhammadu Buhari declined assent to the Digital Rights and Freedom Bill drafted to protect the fundamental rights and safety of Nigerians on the internet on the grounds that it covered too many technical subjects and failed to address any of them extensively ([Ekwealor, 2019](#); [Paul, 2019](#)). The situation accentuated with heightened spate of digital restrictions by African states such as Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya ([Chiefe, 2019](#)). Thus, seemingly indicating the direction of government policy about internet rights and freedom of speech, paragraph 13 of President Buhari's 2019 Independence Day Speech marking the occasion of the 59th Independence Anniversary of Nigeria ([Buhari, 2019](#)) unequivocally stated that:

“Our attention is increasingly being focused on cybercrimes and the abuse of technology through hate speech and other divisive material being propagated on social media. Whilst we uphold the constitutional rights of our people to freedom of expression and association, where the purported exercise of these rights infringes on the rights of other citizens or threatens to undermine our national security, we will take firm and decisive action.”

From reporting Ebola outbreak in 2014 through EndSars in 2020, Covid-19 pandemic to unending Boko Haram insurgency, incessant attacks on police and other uniform men formations across Southern Nigeria, farmers'-herders' conflicts across geopolitical zones, successive governments and their agencies have been engrossed in management of social media contents which the governments considered hate speeches ([Ekoh & George, 2021](#)). Most calls and demands for accountability, responsibility and answerability from the government constitute hate speech, cyber bullying and radicalism by citizens and opposition.

Given this new platform for engagement with government and institutions, how has social media affected the responsiveness of government to the demand for accountability? How has government dealt with the social media? How does a social medium affect the social norms associated with political participation? There is growing disillusionment with rulers and governments as corruption scandals have fuelled discontent with the conduct of governance in Africa. This paper therefore examined the dialectics of shrinking civic space and freedom of expression manifesting through the social media regulation bill as a major indicator of autocratization in Nigeria.

Metode

This study employs a qualitative research approach to examine the impact of social media regulation on freedom of expression in Nigeria. A combination of semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and online observations is utilized to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences, perceptions, and opinions regarding social media regulation and its consequences on freedom of expression. The qualitative approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of the complex relationships between social media regulation, government policies, and freedom of expression in the Nigerian context.

Data collection consists of semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of participants, including journalists, social media users, civil society activists, and government representatives ([Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014](#)). Approximately 15-20 interviews are conducted, with each interview lasting around 45-60 minutes. The interviews are guided by open-ended questions that encourage participants to express their thoughts and opinions freely. In addition to the interviews, document analysis is performed on

relevant policy documents, reports, news articles, and academic literature related to social media regulation and freedom of expression in Nigeria. Online observations of social media platforms are also conducted to examine the real-time impact of regulations on users' freedom of expression. Data analysis involves a thematic analysis of the interview transcripts, document analysis findings, and online observation notes. The data is coded and organized into themes and sub-themes that reflect the research objectives and questions. The analysis process is iterative, with constant comparisons made between the data sources to ensure the findings are grounded in the participants' experiences and perspectives.

Results and Discussion

Social Media Regulation

People all around the world, throughout history, have sought the freedom to do as they please. This desire for freedom drives individuals to pursue their inherent roles as free moral and political agents ([Cohen-Almagor, 2017](#); [Dierksmeier, 2019](#)). According to [Okoro & Odi \(2013\)](#), central to this quest for freedom is the ability "to freely express one's views and have access to information on activities, programs, and decisions made by those governing them." Among all forms of freedom, [D'Arcy \(2017\)](#) argues that freedom of the press and expression, which guarantees the right to seek, obtain, and share information about leadership activities without fear or favor, is the most crucial in a democratic state. Unfortunately, in Nigeria, these rights are being threatened by elected leaders who have made explicit attempts to silence critical media voices. Successive governments have imposed severe restrictions on press freedom, including the rising use of social media ([Ndinojuo & Udouo, 2018](#)).

The conventional media in Nigeria, consisting of journalists, reporters, and media houses engaged in news reporting, opinion sharing, and information distribution, are monitored, regulated, and even controlled by the government and its agencies. The government often perceives the media as a threat to national security, as the information they publish can be as harmful as it is informative and educational ([Mohammed, 2021](#)). The advent and widespread use of social media have given rise to citizen journalism, where both trained and untrained individuals generate and distribute content seamlessly, spontaneously, and simultaneously without moderation. Citizens now use social media to speak truth to power, demand accountability, and highlight government injustices in the public domain.

Social media regulation refers to state intervention in the moderation, restriction, and control of social media platforms to ensure national security and stability. This includes any form of restriction and control over the operations of high-tech (tele)communication giants and censorship of media content on computer-mediated software hosting social networking and interactions. Social media regulations involve government or related agencies managing and controlling the affairs of social media apps and platforms to ensure they operate according to defined standards, norms, or customs. Except for the Nigerian Cybercrime Act of 2015, there is no significant direct structure or code for social media regulation in Nigeria.

The Nigerian Constitution supports internet and digital freedom within the framework of International Human Rights Law. This is in addition to the Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) Act 2015 and the Criminal Code, 1990. The Cybercrime Act aims to provide a regulatory framework for the prohibition, prevention, detection, prosecution, and punishment of computer system and network-related crimes, electronic communications, data and computer programs, intellectual property, and privacy rights. The closest regulation that applies to misinformation and posting harmful content on social media is Section 24 (1a), which states that anyone knowingly or intentionally sending a grossly offensive, pornographic, indecent, obscene, or menacing message or material via a computer system or network is guilty of an offense and liable for prosecution. Subsection (1b) states that anyone knowingly or intentionally spreading messages or other material via a computer network system that they know to be false, with the intent to cause annoyance, inconvenience, danger, obstruction, insult, injury, criminal intimidation, enmity, hatred, ill will, or needless anxiety to another person, is guilty of the same offense and liable to a fine or imprisonment for a term of not more than three years, or both.

The initial attempt to regulate digital rights and social media in Nigeria was through the Frivolous Petitions (Prohibition) Bill 2015, which sought to be the instrument for regulating social media. It was introduced

in 2016 during the 8th National Assembly but did not pass. Similarly, President Muhammadu Buhari declined to assent to the Digital Rights Bill 2016, a law intended to protect human rights online, safeguard internet users in Nigeria from infringement of their fundamental freedoms, and guarantee the application of human rights for users of digital platforms and/or digital media and related matters ([Busari, 2019](#)). Here is a table summarizing some relevant laws and regulations pertaining to civil liberties in Nigeria:

Table 1. Summary of Laws and Regulations Related to Civil Liberties in Nigeria

No.	Name of Law / Regulation	Year	Description
1.	Federal Constitution of Nigeria	1999	Governs basic rights and civil liberties, including freedom of speech, assembly, and religion.
2.	Nigerian Cybercrime Act	2015	Provides a legal framework for the prevention, monitoring, and prosecution of cybercrimes related to computer systems, networks, electronic communications, data, and intellectual property rights.
3.	Criminal Code	1990	Regulates various types of crimes in Nigeria, including some related to freedom of speech and media, such as defamation and libel.
4.	Frivolous Petitions (Prohibition) Bill	2015	Proposed legislation aimed at regulating social media, but did not pass into law.
5.	Digital Rights Bill	2016	Proposed legislation aimed at protecting the online rights of internet users in Nigeria, but was rejected by President Muhammedu Buhari.
6.	Protection from Internet Falsehood and Manipulation Bill	2019	Proposed legislation aimed at regulating social media in Nigeria to prevent the spread of false and manipulative information, still under discussion.

The Protection from Internet Falsehood and Manipulation Bill 2019 is another attempt at regulating the social media landscape in Nigeria. The bill was designed to prevent transmission of false statements or false declaration of facts with a view to counter the effects of such transmissions in Nigeria. It aimed at suppressing the financing, promotion and endorsement of false statements hence it projected mechanisms of detection, control and safeguard against misuse of online accounts with sanctions for defaulters. The bill seeks to address the issue of news and information commercialization by the press and more recently; owners and operators of online news media outlets such as social media pages, YouTube channels, websites, blogs and other social network platforms ([Mohammed, 2021](#)).

Civic Space and Engagement in Nigeria

Civic space according to [Agwuegbo \(2021\)](#) depicts "the political, legislative, social and economic environment that enables citizens to come together, share their interests and concerns and act individually and collectively to influence and shape policy-making". It provides latitudes for citizens to enjoy constitutionally guaranteed freedom and pursue individual and collective interests without let and restrictions. Intrinsically, civic space paves way for citizens to demand for accountability because it guards against arbitrary use of state apparatuses of force against citizens. A dynamic and plural civic space allows smooth operations of the civil society organizations to advocate for citizens' rights and demand accountability from the government.

On the other hand, the civic space shrinks or gets closed when the government and or its agencies become less accountable and responsive to the demands of the citizens. Under this condition, institutional guarantees of democracy are rendered subservient and incapacitated. State actors introduce repressive measures to clampdown on demands for accountability and fundamental human rights starting with restrictive legislations, indulging in overbroad application of existing laws and deliberate use of negative rhetoric against the civil society ([Ibezim-Ohaeri, 2017](#)). Long period of military rule in Nigeria shattered procedures for civic engagement and claims to fundamental human rights. It engendered the culture of executive ascendancy resulting in super presidentialism, centralized federalism which repressed peoples' freedom and muzzled the press through decrees that normalized arbitrary use of force against civic engagement, disallowed dissent and shadowy government. The Nigerian executive arm of government is

thus a depository of powers and governmental powers derived from the president or head of state. Might and character of political leadership are the major desiderata of socio-political relations. The law is for ordinary Nigerians who live in deprivation and oppression. Civic space engagement in Nigeria has been a function of social media activism which grants citizens veil of anonymity to freely express their views, articulate and coalesce narratives that were barely possible with the print media that was fully regulated and censored. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and other Liberty Organizations are engaged in perennial civil struggles against the governments to guard the democratic spaces.

Applying the Authoritarian Theory of Mass Communication

Freedom of expression is fundamental and presumed to be inalienable; however, citizens in states with populist leaders who exhibit authoritarian tendencies often face censorship of socio-political communication and discussions. The belief in minimal state control of media and publications to allow greater press freedom is popular but limited in states whose democratic quality is shifting towards authoritarianism. In constitutional democracies, citizens are guaranteed the right to freely express and share their views, regardless of the medium of communication. Section 39 of the Nigerian Constitution grants Nigerian citizens the right to hold opinions and receive and impart ideas and information without interference. The general agreement that news media should be protected from government censorship is based on theories about human nature and inherent rights ([Graber, 2015](#)). The underlying assumption is that all normal human beings are rational and possess inalienable rights to self-determination, including choosing and monitoring their governments.

This paper employs the authoritarian theory of mass communication as a framework to understand and assess why state authorities strive to control media and socio-political communications aggressively and oppressively. The authoritarian theory of mass communication is a normative theory where mass media are influenced and dominated by the political authorities of the state to prevent threats to national security and stability. This theory argues that the media must operate in accordance with the wishes of the authorities, but not under the direct control of the state ([Bajracharya, 2018](#)). It suggests that the press and media should not function independently from the state and that their work is subject to censorship. This theory explains the operation of media and press under authoritarian leadership, where the media is subordinate to state authorities.

Proponents of the theory (communication professors Fred S. Siebert, Theodore Peterson, and Wilbur Schramm) strongly believe that the distribution of state information might endanger national security and threaten state stability. They maintain that the state is greater than individual rights and that the latter should be used to advance the state. In this context, the press is a tool of the powerful, used to increase the rulers' power. Political leadership discretion shapes power configuration and the exercise of fundamental human rights. State authorities license, grant ambiguous rights, suppress media, and harm journalists according to repressive measures. Invariably, this theory undermines the watchdog function and accountability demands of the media from the government. It provides a pretext for censorship and regulation of socio-political communication and discussions, considering information sharing and distribution on social media as hate speech and punishable offenses, thereby taking away the power to criticize the government, its work, decisions, and policies from the media. Consequently, the media is used as a weapon or instrument to strengthen the government's power against its citizens.

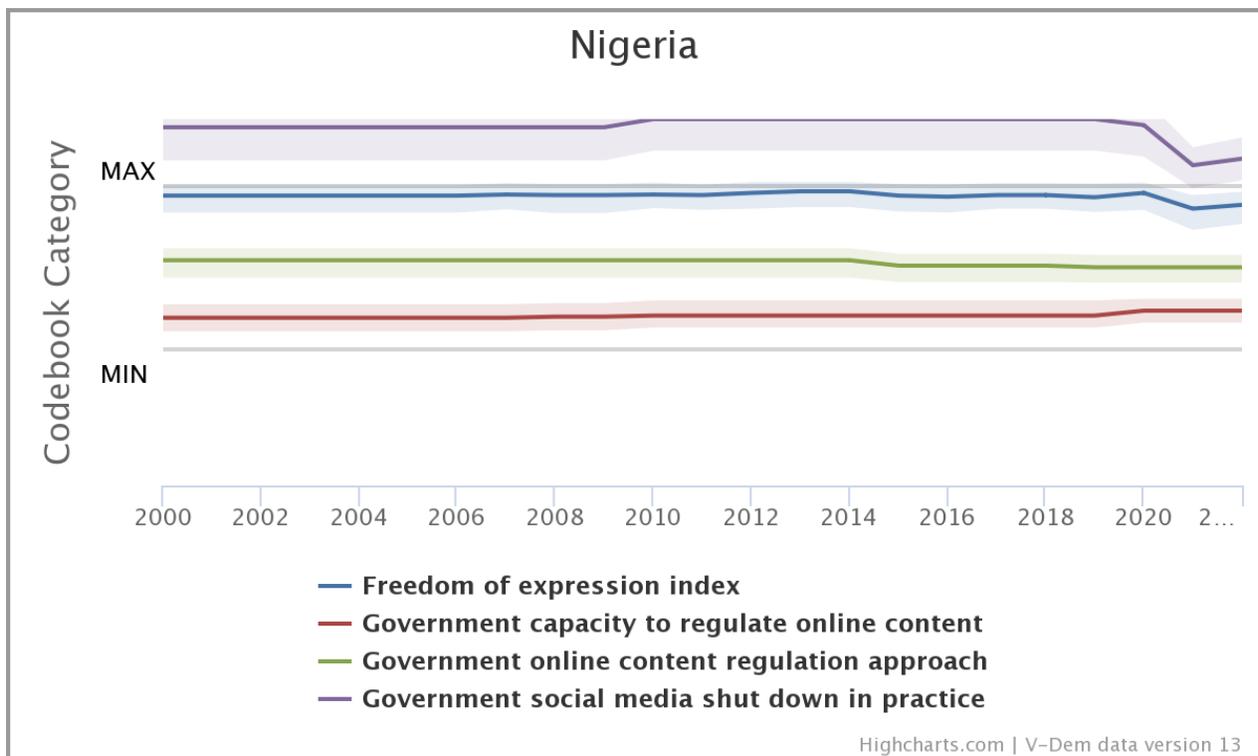
Social Media Regulation and Autocratization in Nigeria

Freedom of expression and independence of the media are constantly being regulated or strangulated across the world. The press is under attack ([Love, 2021](#); [Raman, 2020](#)). Democracy is declining around the world; authoritarianism is gaining ground ([Sloss, 2019](#)). Granted that the world is still more democratic than it was in 1970s and 80s, the level of democracy enjoyed by the average global citizen has continued to dwindle and comparing the levels around 1990. The world is now in a third wave of autocratization with affected number of citizens growing from 415 million in 2016 to 2.6 billion people ([V-Dem Institute, 2021](#)). According to the V-Dem Report, autocratization follows a typical pattern where the ruling government first attacks the media and civil society and polarize the society by disrespecting opponents and spreading false information to undermine elections.

The data from V-Dem indicates several key aspects related to the Nigerian government's approach to

regulating online content and its impact on freedom of expression (see Figure 1). These aspects include the government's use of resources and institutions to monitor and regulate online content, the frequency of social media shutdowns in practice, the government's capacity to regulate online content, and the freedom of expression index. Firstly, the government's approach to online content regulation demonstrates a significant involvement of state resources and institutions in monitoring and regulating online content. This suggests that the Nigerian government prefers to maintain control over online spaces, rather than distributing the regulatory burden to private actors such as Internet service providers. This approach has the potential to create a more restrictive environment for online communication and may limit freedom of expression in the digital sphere.

Figure 1. Government Online Content Regulation Approach, Government Social Media Shut Down in Practice, Government Capacity to Regulate Online Content, Freedom of Expression Index



Source: Processed from V-Dem Data

Secondly, the data reveals that the Nigerian government has, on occasion, shut down access to social media platforms. While the frequency of such shutdowns may not be consistent, these instances highlight a concerning trend where the government exercises control over online spaces to silence dissent and curb the flow of information. This practice can have a negative impact on freedom of expression and limit citizens' ability to engage in political discourse. Thirdly, the government's capacity to regulate online content suggests that it has sufficient staff and resources to enforce existing laws governing internet content. While this capacity can be seen as a positive factor in ensuring compliance with regulations, it also raises concerns about the potential for overreach and excessive control over online spaces, which may stifle freedom of expression.

Lastly, the freedom of expression index provides a broader perspective on the extent to which the Nigerian government respects press and media freedom, the freedom of ordinary people to discuss political matters at home and in public, and the freedom of academic and cultural expression. Although there might be some level of freedom in these areas, the data indicates that there is still room for improvement in promoting and protecting freedom of expression in Nigeria.

Successive Nigerian governments had through unpopular policies and acts of irresponsiveness attracted public outcry and criticisms that were expressed on social media platforms owing to the level of censorship meted out to the conventional media. The passage and signing of the Freedom of Information Act

notwithstanding, the people of Nigeria have continued to live in a world of gagged press and regulated freedom of expression largely because the executive arm of successive governments have assumed enormous powers from centralized federalism that is giving rise to a very strong presidential democracy. The executive arm of the government at the centre depending upon the personality of political leadership is the epicentre of power division and rule of law in Nigeria (Kalu, 2018). The character of political leadership subsumed in the presidency shapes and determines the functioning of both the legislature and the judiciary. Democracy preaches shadowy government, freedom of expression and independent press but the personality of leadership is a factor that propels quality of democracy where the institutional guarantees are unstable and wavy. Unfortunately, every leader does not tolerate opposition and criticism at the same level. Democratically elected leaders who share autocratic tendencies or have military training do not easily subscribe and observe democratic ethos. The press and freedom of expression have witnessed unrelenting attacks since the dawn of the Fourth Republic especially under Presidents Obasanjo and Buhari.

In Nigeria, the advent of the new media has revolutionized processes of social and political communications (Suntai & Targema, 2018). It expanded the frontiers of political participation and, social mobilization while creating vistas for freedom of expression and widening democratic spaces. Social media and online broadcasting provided platforms for simultaneous and seamless interactions between the masses and the government. It increased the volume of information at the disposal of the masses. As internet penetration increases with greater broadband development and smart phone usage, more Nigerians access the internet and subscribe to social media sites. Currently, at a record 50% internet penetration, 187.9 million Nigerians have mobile connections with 33 million social media subscriptions. Social media has indeed revolutionized media and communication in Nigeria (Kemp, 2021). The most used social media platforms in Nigeria are WhatsApp with 93%, Facebook (86.2%), YouTube (81.6%) and Instagram (73.1%) (Gilbert, 2021). Virtually every aspect of our lives has joined social media because it is easier, seamless, instantaneous, interactive and cheaper. The social media has largely changed the pattern of social relations and, civic engagement while offering sustainable opportunities for gathering and sharing of news items, communication with audiences and advocacy for change. The social media has provided platforms for citizens-state interaction in the public sphere. It provides higher levels of participation for younger people and an avenue for women who have not been very active and vocal with a voice to demand for accountability.

The Buhari administration has since inauguration in 2015 demonstrated intolerance to opposition and criticism by its persistent attempts at restricting the use of social media. The government believes that social media increase the spread of fake news, hate speeches, extremism, and organized protests leading to uncontrollable unrest (Bakare, 2020; Busari, 2019). Hence, it is determined to establish restrictive policies on the operation and use of social media in Nigeria. The government illegally use the Cybercrimes Act of 2015 to criminalize online speeches and detain journalists, critics and online dissidents. The freedom of expression for citizens had been challenged with this law and citizens are experiencing the impact of undemocratic interpretations of sections of the law. Political office holders and powerful government officials have exploited the law to attack citizens who share critical views or general criticisms of their (government officials) actions on social media. The denial of assent to the Digital Rights and Freedom Bill 2016 and subsequent introduction of the Protection from Internet Falsehood and Manipulation Bill 2019 are clear indications of the government commitment to close the online civic space, limit press freedom and strangulate critical opposition. Many journalists, social media users and activists have been arrested, incarcerated and killed between 2016 and now under the Cybercrime Act for their online posts.

Obnoxiously and in flagrant drive to gag, muzzle and strangulate free speech, media freedom and close the online civic space without known legislations, the Buhari administration clamped down on the operations of Twitter, a microblogging and social networking site in Nigeria on 4th June, 2021. Eventually, the government started regulation of social media in Nigeria through sanctions wherein it accused Twitter of vicarious liability for destruction of government properties and, wanton violence during the #EndSars protest. Clearly, Twitter like other social media apps provide platforms for Nigerian online users to express their grievances, personal and collective views about government policies and programmes constitute veritable medium for the circulation and spreading of narratives that easily generate public sympathy against government injustices. The suspension of the operations of Twitter was a calculated measure to

forestall ongoing mobilization by #RevolutionNow group for June 12 protest against bad governance in Nigeria. The government ceased the opportunity of Twitter's deletion of President Buhari's tweet against the Igbos to execute a planned action designed to avoid a repeat of #EndSars Protest that would have gone out of proportion owing to widespread violent conflicts and resort to self-help by many citizens and groups who were fed up with the inabilities of the government to provide good governance in Nigeria ([Dambo et al., 2022](#); [Uwalaka, 2022](#); [Uwazuruike & Raphael, 2020](#)).

Table 2. Key Events Related to Freedom of Expression and Media Independence in Nigeria

Year	Event
2015	Cybercrime (Prohibition, Prevention etc) Act adopted
2016	Denial of assent to the Digital Rights and Freedom Bill
2019	Introduction of the Protection from Internet Falsehood and Manipulation Bill
2020	#EndSars protest
2021	Suspension of Twitter's operations in Nigeria

Table 2 highlights key events related to freedom of expression and media independence in Nigeria, showcasing significant milestones and challenges that have shaped the country's media landscape over the years. The table outlines a chronological sequence of events, starting with the period of military rule, where the media was heavily censored and controlled by the government. This era witnessed the suspension of the Nigerian Constitution, which led to a curtailment of fundamental human rights, including the right to freedom of expression. During this period, journalists and media organizations faced considerable pressure and constraints from the government, resulting in numerous cases of harassment, detention, and even death of media professionals.

As Nigeria transitioned to democratic rule in 1999, the media landscape began to witness some improvements, with the Nigerian Constitution being reinstated and the right to freedom of expression reestablished. This period saw an increase in media diversity and the emergence of private media organizations that challenged the status quo. However, despite these positive developments, the media still faced substantial challenges, including government interference, threats to journalists, and the suppression of critical voices.

In recent years, the advent of social media has revolutionized the way information is disseminated in Nigeria, giving rise to citizen journalism and providing a platform for citizens to express their opinions more freely. However, this transformation has also been accompanied by growing concerns about the spread of misinformation and the government's efforts to control and regulate online spaces. As the table shows, various laws and policies have been proposed to control social media usage, some of which have been met with strong resistance from civil society organizations and citizens who view these measures as threats to freedom of expression and media independence.

Clearly, the incapacitation of the state started with the capture and domination, by the executive arm of the government, of legislative and judicial powers in such manners that the National Assembly became a rubber stamp that passes every action while the courts are lame-ducked into toothless bulldogs. Court decisions are obeyed when in line with government plans. The state is indeed in private hands and is being used for personal and group goals. Civil societies are shouting and threatening court actions that do not generate freedom at the wake of resultant autocracy. Nigerians are back to square one: widespread insecurity, chains of abject poverty, deprivation and gross violation of basic freedom are the rules.

Conclusion

The rise of the internet and social media has significantly transformed media communications in Nigeria, leading to the emergence of citizen journalism and a shift in the way information is disseminated. However, this transformation has been accompanied by an alarming decline in democratic values and an

increase in authoritarian tendencies among elected governments, particularly under the current administration of President Muhammadu Buhari. The repression of free speech, media independence, and human rights has become a significant concern as the government seeks to control dissent and silence opposition voices.

To address these challenges and promote democratic governance, it is crucial for civil society organizations to advocate for the implementation of the Digital Rights and Internet Freedom Bill, passed in 2016. This would help to safeguard the online civic space and protect the fundamental rights of Nigerian citizens. Additionally, it is essential for the government to adhere to the principle of federal character in resource distribution and encourage greater citizen participation in public affairs. By doing so, Nigeria can work towards restoring its democratic values and fostering a more open and inclusive society.

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