

Assignment on
**HISTORY OF MODERN GOVERNMENT AND THE
MASS MEDIA IN NIGERIA**



Introduction

The attitude of modern government in Nigeria does not differ from that of colonial government in terms of repressive laws against the press, especially the military dictators in fact, it can be said that military edicts and decrees took after the colonial government ordinance law against the press because they were similar in targeting against the press and press freedom, in fact, the military press law can even be said to be more dangerous with the press than that of the colonial government because during military dictators, lots of journalists were arrested, jailed, killed, kidnapped, molested and many media houses were locked for violating some of the military governments edicts and decrees especially Decree 4.

In 1984, Buhari passed Decree Number 4, the Protection Against False Accusations Decree, considered by scholars as the most repressive press law ever enacted in Nigeria (Wikipedia, nd). Drafted on March 29, 1984, Decree No. 4 was the most dreaded, most repressive and the last press law enacted in Nigeria. It was promulgated during the military regime of Major General Buhari which did not take kindly to press criticisms (GBTYO, 2014).

Although, with Nigeria welcome democracy in 1999, there was a great relief to press as there was a high degree of press freedom compared to the days of military due to the fact that democracy is all about freedom and because Nigeria is signatory to many International charters that emphasize press freedom. However, the most recent pointer to high level of press freedom came into play in 5th June when the Federal Government banned Twitter operations in the country on June 5, 2021.

Brief Overview of Freedom of Expression in Nigeria

Section 39 (1) of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria as amended guarantees freedom of expression as a fundamental right. This right is also guaranteed under the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments. Provisions are also made in the Constitution and the respective International Instruments for restriction to, and derogation from this right (Imo, 2011).

Freedom of expression is one of the fundamental rights, which are universally recognised and protected. Indeed, the Constitutions of most countries of the world, including Nigeria have expressly provided for the protection of this right because of its importance and relevance to the enhancement of personal liberty and democracy. The right to freedom of expression is also protected under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the various regional Instruments and Conventions on human rights, including the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights.

Brief Overview of Press Censorship

From 1859 to 1960, the Nigerian press was privately owned. However, this did not guarantee the freedom of speech since the majority of newspaper proprietors were actively involved in politics. Therefore, these newspapers typically acted as advocates of their owner's political interest.

Twitter Ban and Press Freedom and Freedom of Expression

According to Accountabilitylab (2021), press freedom has historically been a contentious issue in many African countries, with Nigeria criticized as one of West Africa's most dangerous and difficult countries for journalists. The RSF Tracker 19 tool exposes great hostility and mistrust towards African journalists and media outlets, which are too often regarded as enemies rather than allies. The most recent pointer to high level of press freedom come into play in 5th June when the Federal Government banned Twitter operations in the country on June 5, 2021.

This step received criticism across the world and from different organizations seeking immediate lift of the ban. They describe the step as barbaric especially in this 21st century but the Nigeria government insisted that certain conditions need to be met before lifting ban on Twitter. However, government lifted ban on Twitter after 222 days' suspension (Tolu-Kolawole, 2022).

Some Victims of Repressive Press Freedom in Nigeria

An illustrative list of journalists, human rights and individuals who were arrested, intimidated, detained, molested include the following but not limited to according to Chibuzor (2013)

1. *On July 26, 2016 Jones Abiri, a journalist and publisher of Weekly Source Newspaper in Yenegoa, Bayelsa State was arrested by government*
2. *In January 2017, the police raided the Premium Times office in Abuja and arrested the publisher, Dapo Olorunyomi, and the judiciary correspondent, Evelyn Okakwu.*
3. *August 14th 2018 : A Premium Times reporter, Samuel Ogundipe was arrested by the Nigerian Police for theft and unlawful possession of restricted and classified documents*
4. *Omoyele Sowore was forcibly re-arrested by the DSS at his court hearing on 6 December after being released on bail less than 24 hours earlier.*
5. *Journalist and activist Agba Jalingo, publisher of the online news site CrossRiverWatch. Jalingo was arrested on 22 August 2019*

Conclusion

With the aforementioned state of press freedom in Nigeria, therefore, it is not surprising that Nigeria was ranked 120 out of 180 countries in the 2021 World Press Freedom Index compiled by Reporters Without Borders (RSF). Nigeria ranks with countries like Afghanistan, Jordan, Zimbabwe, Palestine, Qatar and South Sudan (Socrates, 2021).

References

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