

SAFETY OF FREELANCE JOURNALISTS

Coping Strategies and Resilience of Freelance Journalists in Sub-Saharan Africa

Abstract

Freelance journalists in Sub-Saharan Africa operate in volatile environments marked by political instability, conflicts, and weak institutional protections. Working without the backing of established media organizations, these journalists face overlapping physical, psychological, digital, legal, and financial threats from state actors, non-state groups, and societal forces. Recurring and sustained forms of intimidation, including harassment and legal actions, undermine their safety and professional autonomy. Journalists employ diverse coping mechanisms, such as proactive planning, digital security practices, informal support networks, and collaboration with international organizations. Female journalists, in particular, adopt additional strategies to navigate gender-specific harassment and stigmatization. Despite resilience and ingenuity, many journalists are forced into self-censorship or withdrawal due to a lack of institutional resources, highlighting the precarious nature of freelance journalism in these regions. The findings call for systemic interventions, including legal protections, gender-sensitive policies, and digital security training. Collaborative networks and international partnerships also play a critical role in protecting journalists and sustaining independent reporting in high-risk contexts.

Edited by Nikolaos Toumaras.

Local Contributors: Adamu Haruna, Fatoumata Ouoba, Esther Njuguna, Emmanuel Birungi,
Louise Mukalay, Roger Mwepu.

Introduction

Insecure democracies in Africa, with uneven democratic performance, tend to have higher rates of journalist assassinations and other anti-press violence (Hughes et al., 2020). The relationship between violence and democracy in the Global South is often mutually constitutive: democratic institutions can influence violent practices, while violence undermines access to the rights and freedoms that democracy is intended to guarantee (Von Holdt, 2014).

News journalism can play a crucial role in building civil peace in post-civil war settings by developing an ethos of civil norm building, fostering civil consciousness among audiences, and encouraging peaceful cooperation through news reporting (Harrison and Pukallus, 2023). However, journalists' professional autonomy is constrained by discrepancies between their personal goals and values, organizational priorities, and the time pressures imposed by their news organizations, particularly when economic objectives conflict with journalistic ideals (Skovsgaard, 2014). Independent journalists in Africa face profound risks, including physical, psychological, or emotional threats, restrictive legal frameworks, and digital censorship. These risks are widespread across various regions and intensify during politically sensitive periods, such as elections. In sub-Saharan Africa, in particular, journalists are at heightened risk of assaults, killings, and enforced disappearances during election cycles (Keeble, 2019; Ola, 2020).

Restrictive laws and policies in East African countries, such as Tanzania and Burundi, have led to a significant decline in media freedom

and heightened risks for journalists. In Burundi, following the 2015 coup attempt, numerous journalists faced threats, exile, and the closure of their media outlets. This crackdown severely undermined the independent broadcasting sector and disrupted journalists' professional identities (Frère, 2017). In Ethiopia, non-state actors like vigilante groups and influential social media personalities have emerged as major threats to journalism, fostering a climate of fear and psychological intimidation. These threats compound traditional state-sponsored attacks, further destabilizing the media environment (Workneh, 2024). In Nigeria, journalists are subjected to indiscriminate physical and digital threats from security forces, insurgents, and community members, particularly during election periods. Such conditions often escalate into violence, resulting in the killing or disappearance of journalists (Ola, 2020). In Uganda, despite a relatively free media landscape, journalists face significant dangers when critically reporting on the government. Both legal and extralegal measures are routinely employed to curtail free expression (Sobel and McIntyre, 2020). In Kenya, journalists covering terrorism endure severe psychological trauma and distress, manifesting in symptoms such as insomnia, nightmares, memory loss, and reliance on alcohol as a coping mechanism (Muindi, 2023).

Freelance, independent journalists play a vital yet increasingly precarious role in the media landscape, especially in high-risk environments. As self-employed professionals, these journalists often lack the institutional protections afforded to their counterparts in established media organizations, such as access to legal aid,

mental health support, or formal safety training (Conrad 2015; Josephi and O'Donnell, 2023). This vulnerability is magnified in regions like in Sub-Saharan Africa marked by political instability, armed conflict, and weak governance. In these contexts, freelance journalists serve as critical humanitarian and information actors, reporting on issues ranging from corruption and human rights abuses to election misconduct. However, their independence, while fostering autonomy, also exposes them to unique and often overlapping threats from state actors, non-state groups, and societal forces.

This research explores the realities of freelance journalists operating in these volatile settings, focusing on the interplay of threats, coping mechanisms, and outcomes. Using a qualitative approach, in-depth interviews were conducted with journalists identified through purposive sampling to ensure diverse yet comparable perspectives. Through this examination, the research identifies systemic challenges of safety and highlights the adaptive strategies that freelancers employ, offering critical insights into the broader implications for press freedom and the sustainability of independent journalism in high-risk environments.

Literature Review

International news reporting in Sub-Saharan Africa is undergoing significant evolution, driven by a precarious new media economy and the increasing use of network-based digital platforms. This shift has fostered a multilayered confederacy of diverse forms of communication and correspondences (Nothias, 2018; Vicente, 2013). Foreign

correspondents are adapting to this dynamic media landscape, redefining their professional roles while navigating the growing influence of citizen journalists within the transnational mediasphere (Vicente, 2019).

Gig work in Sub-Saharan Africa presents an opportunity to formalize media production and promote decent work, including in journalism. However, for these benefits to materialize, digital platforms must adopt and implement robust protocols to ensure fair and equitable working conditions (Ayentimi et al., 2023). For example, in Nigeria, the internet has profoundly transformed journalism, with media houses increasingly training staff in online journalism and government initiatives improving access to information in rural areas (Apuke and Omar, 2021). Freelancers working for international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) challenge traditional distinctions between journalism and advocacy, blending roles in a way that helps avoid the inter-role conflicts often experienced by those employed in traditional news outlets or commercial public relations (Wright, 2016).

Journalists in Sub-Saharan Africa increasingly navigate a disconnect between what editors deem newsworthy and the narratives their communities believe, which often align with government-issued information (Gondwe et al., 2023). During election periods, journalists play a vital role in informing the public and ensuring accountability, yet they face pervasive physical and digital threats. This underscores the urgent need for enhanced state protections for journalists during such critical times (Ola, 2020). In Zimbabwe, journalists' framing of recent elections contributed to political violence and polarization, emphasizing the importance of

adopting peace journalism practices to mitigate these harmful effects (Tsarwe and Mare, 2019). However, in countries like Zambia and Tanzania, many journalists do not identify as data journalists or consider themselves equipped for advanced reporting due to a lack of computer-assisted reporting tools and declining proficiency in quantitative methods (Gondwe and White, 2022). Journalism training programs in Sub-Saharan Africa have the potential to strengthen journalists' roles as watchdogs and public educators, though further research is needed to evaluate their long-term impact (Schiffrin and Behrman, 2011). Notably, peace journalism training has positively influenced the reporting of Nigerian elections by promoting balance, fairness, and accuracy while encouraging non-violent responses (Adebayo, 2016; Peterson et al., 2023). Conversely, donor-driven journalism training programs often face significant limitations in improving the broader media landscape due to persistent structural challenges within African media systems (Schiffrin, 2013).

Continuous attacks on journalists in African countries, particularly during election periods, such as in Nigeria, represent severe violations of their fundamental human rights and pose significant challenges to the journalism profession (Ola, 2020; Pate and Jibril, 2024). Addressing impunity for those who harm or take journalists hostage is among the most effective measures for enhancing the safety of freelance journalists, particularly those reporting from conflict zones (Grossman, 2017). In North East Nigeria, journalists face extreme risks due to the lack of protective mechanisms and insufficient professional safety training, leaving them highly vulnerable in dangerous environments (Pate and Jibril,

2023). To improve journalist safety, training programs should integrate considerations of physical risks, journalistic practices, gender-specific challenges, and individual resources as key elements of risk assessments (Hoiby and Garrido, 2020).

Governments in sub-Saharan Africa frequently enact laws and regulations designed to suppress free speech, manipulate licensing systems, and direct public funding to pro-government media outlets. In Uganda, for instance, despite constitutional protections for press freedom, the government has intensified control over independent media through restrictive legislation and violent crackdowns on journalists (Sobel and McIntyre, 2020). These measures have included imprisoning journalists, shutting down media houses, imposing internet blackouts, and introducing social media taxes, all aimed at curtailing the mobilizing and informational power of digital platforms (Conroy-Krutz, 2020).

Journalists also face harassment and physical violence from various actors, including political representatives, security forces, and citizens. This is particularly evident in South Africa, where attacks on journalists have been escalating (Reid et al., 2020). Simultaneously, public support for media freedom is waning, with growing approval of government-imposed restrictions. This trend is linked to increased societal polarization and declining media professionalism, both of which erode trust in and support for an independent press (VonDoepp and Young, 2024; Kwoide et al., 2024).

Additionally, gender disparities and hostile work environments remain pervasive in newsrooms across countries such as Kenya, South Africa, and Nigeria. These

environments are marked by high levels of hostile sexism and sexual harassment, with male journalists often exhibiting higher levels of sexism and a perception of newsroom equality that does not align with the lived experiences of their female colleagues (Blumell and Mulupi, 2021). In Southern Africa, female journalists face sexual harassment in various forms, including name-calling, body shaming, trolling, and cyberstalking. These challenges are exacerbated by inadequate policies and ineffective media regulatory frameworks in countries such as Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Namibia, contributing to psychological distress and self-censorship among women journalists (Msimanga et al., 2023). In Zimbabwe, journalists encounter gender biases, subtle sexual harassment, and unethical practices that hinder efforts to adopt feminist journalism practices aimed at fostering a non-oppressive newsroom culture (Mpofu, 2022). To counter these challenges, women journalists have found support in closed social groups, which serve as platforms for professional solidarity and foster an ethics of care. Participation in these groups has been shown to positively influence job satisfaction and boost confidence in addressing safety concerns and threats (Mesmer and Jahng, 2021).

Methodology

Research Design

In this research, freelance, independent journalists are defined as self-employed media professionals who work without long-term affiliations to a single organization. They produce journalistic content on a per-project or per-piece basis, often under precarious

conditions, and rely on a portfolio of skills to navigate a fluid labor market. Drawing from the concept of self-identification, these individuals actively align themselves with journalistic norms, practices, and values despite the blurring boundaries between journalism and other forms of media work (Joseph and O'Donnell, 2023).

A total of 41 in-depth interviews were conducted for this research with independent, freelance journalists from four African countries: Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, and South Sudan. These interviews were carried out online multiple times, as informal, conversational engagements over the course of 2024. The primary focus of these discussions was to explore and better understand the theme of safety for freelance journalists acting as independent humanitarian and information actors in their respective local contexts.

Purposive sampling is the most appropriate method for this research, since this is particularly effective when the research aims to gain in-depth insights from a specific group, especially when that group is not easily accessible or is small in number (Bakkalbasioglu, 2020). This non-probability sampling technique involves intentionally selecting participants who possess specific characteristics pertinent to this research, in this case, freelancer journalists with firsthand experience reporting in volatile Sub-Saharan African regions. This method allows researchers to select participants who can provide the most relevant and comprehensive information about the phenomenon under investigation. After identifying a first group of journalists via personal connections, snowball sampling leverages the networks of initial

participants to identify and recruit additional subjects who meet the research criteria. To enhance the reach and depth, combining purposive sampling with snowball sampling is advantageous, since this technique is particularly useful for accessing hard-to-reach populations, such as freelancers operating in conflict zones, by utilizing existing connections to expand the participant pool (Firdaus et al., 2024). By integrating purposive and snowball sampling methods, this research can achieve a comprehensive understanding of freelancer journalists' safety perceptions, ensuring that the data collected is both relevant and robust.

This group of 41 freelance journalists that was identified through these targeted sampling methods represents a diverse range of Sub-Saharan African countries, with participants primarily operating in major urban areas. The sample achieved a near-equal gender balance, consisting of 23 men and 20 women. The selection focused on individuals with a medium level of professional experience, predominantly those with 7 to 15 years of practice in the field. The age range of participants spanned from 25 to 40 years, ensuring a focus on journalists in the early to mid-stages of their careers.

The interviews were designed informally as semi-structured conversations, allowing for flexibility while maintaining a consistent focus on core themes related to the safety and professional experiences of freelance journalists (Marín-Sanchiz et al., 2023). This approach enabled the research to explore complex, personal, and context-specific insights in depth, which is essential when investigating sensitive topics such as safety in volatile environments. Each conversation

began with general questions about the participants' backgrounds, their motivations for entering journalism, and their current roles as independent freelancers. This was followed by an exploration of their lived experiences as freelancers in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly focusing on the unique challenges they face in terms of physical safety, psychological well-being, and professional autonomy. To ensure a holistic understanding, discussions also covered their interactions with local communities, governmental and non-governmental humanitarian organizations, and media houses.

A conversational tone was adopted to foster trust and encourage open dialogue. Participants were prompted to share specific incidents or anecdotes that exemplified the risks and coping mechanisms associated with their roles. Key areas of focus included, for example, perceptions of risk and how participants perceive threats to their safety and the sources of these threats (e.g., political actors, armed groups, or societal pressures), support systems and insights into the availability and effectiveness of support systems, including legal protections, professional networks, and mental health resources, or the impact on journalism and the broader implications of safety concerns on their journalistic practices, such as self-censorship, story selection, and investigative rigor.

Interviews were conducted online, leveraging video conferencing tools to accommodate the dispersed and sometimes mobile nature of freelance journalists. To address potential concerns related to digital surveillance and security, participants were provided with encrypted communication options, ensuring

confidentiality and protection of sensitive information. The conversational format also allowed participants to guide parts of the discussion, bringing up issues they felt were most critical. This participatory element enriched the data by highlighting unanticipated themes and providing a platform for voices often marginalized in discussions about journalistic safety. All participants were provided with detailed information about the research objectives, the nature of their involvement, and the intended use of the data collected. Consent was obtained in writing or orally, depending on the participant's preference and access to secure communication tools.

Research Framework

A framework for analyzing the perceptions of safety of journalists for this research has been developed that incorporates various coding dimensions, perceptions and frames across different categories. Based on recent research on journalists' safety (Waisbord, 2022; Slavtcheva-Petkova et al., 2024; Mesquita and de-Lima-Santos, 2023), this model is structured to be holistic and interdisciplinary, and it can be applicable to different contexts globally. The framework for analyzing journalist safety includes several dimensions to address the multifaceted challenges journalists face (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Journalist Safety Framework

1. Type of Threat

- Physical Threats
 - Assault and Murder: Direct physical violence including beatings, torture,

kidnappings, and killings of journalists.

- Detention and Imprisonment: Arbitrary detention and imprisonment by state or non-state actors.
- Forced Displacement: Coercive actions leading to exile, forced migration, or relocation due to threats.
- Psychological Threats
 - Harassment and Intimidation: Verbal abuse, threats, hate speech, doxxing, and public ridicule, including online harassment.
 - Cyber Harassment: Digital hate speech, cyberstalking, and coordinated attacks on social media.
 - Trauma from Coverage: Psychological impacts from covering traumatic events such as wars, disasters, or violence.
- Digital Threats
 - Surveillance: Government or corporate monitoring, unauthorized data access, and digital privacy breaches.
 - Hacking and Data Breaches: Unauthorized access to digital devices, accounts, and sensitive information.
 - Censorship and Blocking: Online content being blocked, censored, or criminalized, including legal

repercussions for publishing sensitive content.

- Financial Threats

- Economic Pressure: Financial penalties, job insecurity, or economic coercion through withdrawal of advertising.
- Legal Financial Burden: High costs associated with defending against defamation or other legal actions aimed at suppressing journalism.
- Precarity and Instability: Increased economic instability, particularly affecting freelancers and small media outlets.

2. Source of Threat

- State Actors

- Government Agencies: Actions by police, military, intelligence, or other governmental bodies, including legal threats and censorship.
- Judicial Systems: Use of legal mechanisms to intimidate, silence, or suppress journalists, often through strategic lawsuits (SLAPPs).

- Non-State Actors

- Criminal Organizations: Threats from organized crime, including cartels and gangs.

- Corporations: Legal, economic, or physical threats from businesses or corporate entities seeking to suppress negative reporting.
- Religious and Ethnic Groups: Threats based on religious, ethnic, or ideological grounds.

- Public/Mobs

- Online Mobs: Coordinated harassment campaigns by online communities or influencers.
- Physical Mobs: Violence from groups during protests, rallies, or other public events, often targeting journalists covering these events.

3. Intensity and Frequency of Threat

- Severity of Threat

- Low Severity: Minor threats that cause distress but do not significantly disrupt the journalist's work.
- Moderate Severity: Threats that require changes in reporting practices or increased security measures.
- High Severity: Severe threats that could result in physical harm, psychological trauma, or major disruptions to work.

- Frequency of Threat

- Isolated Incidents: One-time events or attacks without a history of repeated threats.
- Recurring Threats: Repeated attacks or harassment over time, indicating ongoing targeting.
- Constant Threats: Persistent and ongoing threats that are a continuous part of the journalist's professional life.

acknowledging or addressing threats, leading to increased danger and potential harm.

4. Coping Mechanisms

- Adaptive Coping
 - Problem-Focused Coping: Strategic planning, seeking external support, and implementing security measures.
 - Emotion-Focused Coping: Psychological support, mental health programs, and managing emotional responses to threats.
- Maladaptive Coping
 - Avoidance: Ignoring or downplaying threats, which may lead to unsafe practices or withdrawal from dangerous reporting.
 - Compliance: Self-censorship or altering behavior to minimize risk, potentially compromising journalistic integrity.
- No Coping
 - Continuing Without Heeding Risks: Persisting in journalistic work without

5. Outcomes

- Resilience: Successful adaptation and recovery, allowing journalists to continue their work while maintaining safety and professional integrity.
- Uncompromised Continuation: Persisting in journalistic work without regard for risks, which may result in either resilience or severe consequences due to unaddressed threats.
- Boundary Expansion: Blurring the traditional boundaries of journalism by integrating new roles and practices, such as cybersecurity and legal defense, to safeguard journalistic work and autonomy.
- Submission: Yielding to threats, resulting in reduced autonomy, self-censorship, or withdrawal from the profession.
- Exit: Leaving journalism due to overwhelming threats or a lack of coping resources, leading to a loss of diverse voices in media.

Sources: Authors elaboration with information from Waisbord, 2022; Slavtcheva-Petkova et al., 2024; Mesquita and de-Lima-Santos, 2023.

The types of threats encompass physical, psychological, digital, legal, and financial risks. Physical threats include violence, imprisonment, and displacement, while psychological threats involve harassment, trauma, and cyber abuse. Digital threats stem

from surveillance, hacking, and censorship. Legal threats exploit lawsuits and restrictive laws, and financial threats involve economic instability and litigation costs, disproportionately affecting small outlets and freelancers. The sources of threats are diverse. State actors, including government agencies and judicial systems, use censorship, surveillance, and legal mechanisms to suppress journalism. Non-state actors such as organized crime and corporations also play significant roles in targeting journalists. Societal pressures, including online and physical mobs, further exacerbate risks, often fueled by polarization and misinformation. The intensity and frequency of threats vary significantly. Low-intensity threats cause minor disruption, while high-intensity threats involve severe physical harm, psychological trauma, or major career disruptions. Threats can manifest as isolated incidents, recurring attacks, or sustained campaigns, deeply affecting the journalist's ability to work safely and autonomously.

Coping mechanisms and strategies are critical to managing and mitigating these challenges. Adaptive mechanisms include planning, seeking legal or technological support, and building resilience through peer networks and mental health programs. Innovative strategies, such as role expansion and collaboration, allow journalists to integrate new skills like digital security and advocacy into their work, fostering collective resilience. Maladaptive responses, such as avoidance or compliance, can undermine journalistic integrity by prompting self-censorship or withdrawal from sensitive topics. Some journalists persist without addressing risks, either out of necessity or determination, which can lead to extraordinary persistence or severe

consequences depending on the context. The impact of these threats and strategies shapes journalistic practices and societal outcomes. Outcomes range from resilience, where journalists adapt and continue their work, to submission, marked by reduced autonomy or avoiding controversial topics and self-censorship. Others may exit the profession entirely, leading to a diminished diversity of voices in media. Uncompromised continuation without regard for risks can yield either extraordinary persistence or catastrophic consequences. For some, the profession evolves to include expanded roles, blending traditional reporting with advocacy or technical expertise.

Findings

Threats

Type and Source

Physical violence remains one of the most immediate and dangerous threats freelance journalists encounter. Police and military forces frequently target journalists during politically sensitive events. A journalist from Cameroon shared his experience during a political rally: *"I was filming the protest when the police surrounded me, demanding I stop recording. They took my camera and pushed me to the ground before escorting me to the station. I was released later that night but warned not to return to the area."* These interactions often involve physical intimidation intended to deter coverage. In South Sudan, journalists reporting on corruption face similarly oppressive state actions, and a freelancer noted, *"I was arrested and interrogated for days after writing about corruption in the oil sector. They wanted the names of my sources."* Non-state actors also present

significant risks. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), a journalist recounted an incident while covering displacement in a conflict-affected area: *“A group of armed men stopped our car and questioned me about my work. They seemed suspicious of my intentions, but luckily, my local fixer intervened, and we were allowed to leave.”* Such encounters highlight the precarious position journalists occupy in regions with limited state or professional authority.

Psychological intimidation is common, especially for journalists who cover sensitive political or societal issues. A journalist from Nigeria recounted his experience after reporting on alleged vote-buying during an election: *“I started receiving calls from unknown numbers, warning me to stop investigating. It was unnerving because they mentioned details about my family, which I had never shared publicly.”* Digital threats, including cyber harassment and misinformation campaigns, are increasingly common across all regions. In Nigeria, a journalist recounted, *“I wrote a story about corruption in a local government office, and within hours, fake social media accounts started spreading lies about me, saying I was paid by the opposition. It spiraled out of control.”* These online campaigns often lead to real-world consequences, such as reputational damage or physical threats. In the DRC, digital harassment is frequently used in tandem with misinformation. A journalist shared, *“After a story I published about human rights abuses, someone posted my personal contact information online, claiming I was working for foreign interests. The calls and messages didn’t stop for days.”* This combination of doxxing and digital smear campaigns leaves journalists vulnerable to both psychological distress and physical risks.

Restrictive legal frameworks are used as tools to intimidate journalists, particularly in South Sudan. A journalist explained, *“After publishing an investigative piece on government spending, I was summoned to the police station. They accused me of spreading false information and threatened to revoke my press license if I didn’t reveal my sources.”* The use of legal threats to silence critical reporting is a recurring theme across all regions.

Economic constraints further exacerbate these challenges, especially for freelance journalists. A journalist from the DRC described how financial insecurity limits her ability to respond to threats: *“I can’t afford legal representation or security equipment like a reliable phone or camera. Every story I work on feels like a gamble.”* This precarity leaves journalists particularly vulnerable to exploitation and retaliation. Societal forces, including online mobs and vigilante groups, add another layer of risk. A journalist in Cameroon shared, *“After publishing an article about local corruption, community leaders accused me of undermining our traditions. I was verbally attacked in public and had to leave the area for a few weeks.”* These societal dynamics often escalate threats beyond the digital realm, creating unsafe environments for journalists in their own communities.

Female journalists face additional layers of harassment, often gendered in nature. A female journalist from Cameroon shared, *“After publishing a story about domestic violence, I received dozens of messages on social media calling me biased and unprofessional. Some even suggested I was too emotional to handle such topics.”* These experiences underline the intersection of professional and gender-based threats that shape women’s experiences in the field. In South Sudan, the psychological toll of covering conflict is compounded by social stigma. A female journalist explained, *“After*

publishing a story on corruption, I was labeled a troublemaker by community leaders. My neighbors started avoiding me, saying this isn't a work for women, and I was drawing negative attention to the area." These societal pressures isolate journalists, undermining their ability to work effectively. A female journalist in Nigeria shared, *"After covering a gender-based violence case, I started receiving anonymous texts with graphic threats. The messages became so overwhelming that I had to deactivate my social media accounts."* Such experiences highlight the compounded vulnerabilities women face in the profession.

Threats are rarely isolated but instead overlap and amplify each other. Journalists covering conflict zones in the DRC or elections in Nigeria often face physical intimidation, psychological harassment, and digital smear campaigns simultaneously. A journalist in South Sudan explained, *"After exposing a corruption scandal, I received legal threats, my work was discredited online, and strangers began showing up at my house asking questions. I felt like there was nowhere to turn."* These overlapping threats underline the precariousness of journalism in volatile regions. Freelancers, in particular, emphasized the lack of institutional support as a major vulnerability. A journalist from Cameroon summarized, *"We don't have editors protecting us or lawyers defending us. If we face threats, we're on our own."*

Frequency and Intensity

For some journalists, threats occur as one-time events but are no less impactful. In Cameroon, a journalist described an incident while covering an anti-government protest: *"The police seized my camera and threatened to detain me. Although they eventually released me, it was clear they wanted to send a message that such coverage was unwelcome."* These isolated episodes often serve

as deterrents, signaling the risks of continuing critical reporting. Similarly, in South Sudan, journalists occasionally encounter isolated threats tied to specific stories. One journalist recounted: *"I was reporting on a land dispute when local officials approached me and warned me not to publish the article. It was a one-time threat, but it made me reconsider how openly I could cover such issues."* Even when isolated, such threats can have lasting effects on journalists' sense of safety and professional autonomy.

Recurring threats are more common, particularly for journalists who cover politically sensitive topics or operate in conflict zones. In Nigeria, a journalist explained: *"Every election cycle, I receive anonymous calls warning me to stop reporting on vote-buying and electoral fraud. It's predictable but no less stressful each time."* These cyclical threats create an environment of perpetual risk for journalists, especially during politically volatile periods. In the DRC, journalists covering ongoing conflicts face recurring intimidation. One journalist shared: *"Every time I report on abuses by armed groups, I receive warnings through intermediaries telling me to back off. It's the same pattern every few months."* This repetition of threats fosters a climate of fear, limiting journalists' ability to report freely.

Recurring threats are not limited to political coverage. In Cameroon, a journalist covering economic issues noted: *"After publishing several stories about corruption in local businesses, I started receiving threats from different sources, sometimes from officials, sometimes from anonymous numbers. It became a constant part of my work."* Such ongoing risks underscore the cumulative nature of threats for journalists in these settings. For some journalists, threats escalate into sustained campaigns of intimidation, often

involving multiple sources and types of harassment. In the DRC, a journalist recounted: *“After a report on militia activities, I became a target. Armed men came to my house, I was harassed online, and local officials accused me of spreading lies. It went on for weeks, and I had to leave the region temporarily.”* These sustained campaigns often push journalists into self-censorship or force them to relocate for safety.

In Nigeria, sustained harassment frequently occurs during high-stakes reporting. One journalist shared: *“When I investigated a major corruption case, I faced months of pressure—legal threats, online defamation, and even physical surveillance. It felt like there was no escape.”* Such campaigns aim to exhaust journalists, undermining their resilience and ability to continue their work. In South Sudan, the combination of state surveillance and societal pressures often results in prolonged intimidation. A journalist described: *“Once you criticize the government, you’re marked. The threats don’t stop—they just take different forms. One day it’s a warning from an official, the next it’s rumors spread in your community.”* These persistent threats erode journalists’ confidence and amplify their sense of vulnerability.

The severity of threats ranges from low-level harassment to high-intensity actions that jeopardize journalists’ lives and livelihoods. Low-intensity threats, such as subtle warnings or anonymous messages, are common and often precede more aggressive tactics. A journalist in Cameroon explained: *“It started with cryptic text messages telling me to be careful, but later escalated to direct threats against my family.”* Such gradual increases in intensity are a deliberate tactic to instill fear. Moderate-intensity threats frequently disrupt journalists’

work and personal lives without involving direct physical harm. In Nigeria, a journalist shared: *“After publishing a story about election rigging, I started noticing people following me. It was unsettling and made me rethink where I could safely go.”* These threats target journalists’ psychological well-being, forcing them to alter their routines and reporting strategies.

High-intensity threats, including physical violence, prolonged harassment, and legal actions, pose the greatest risks. In the DRC, a journalist recounted: *“When I reported on human rights abuses, I received death threats, my office was vandalized, and I had to change locations multiple times. It felt like I was being hunted.”* Such extreme cases highlight the dangers journalists face when covering contentious topics in unstable regions. The interplay of frequent and intense threats often results in cumulative harm, leaving journalists feeling perpetually unsafe. In South Sudan, a journalist reflected: *“Even when there are no active threats, the fear stays with you. You’re always waiting for the next call or the next warning.”* This persistent sense of danger takes a toll on journalists’ mental health and professional motivation, leading some to avoid high-risk stories or leave the profession altogether.

Across all regions, journalists emphasized the importance of recognizing these threats not as isolated events but as part of a broader pattern of suppression. As one freelancer summarized: *“The threats never really stop—they just take different forms depending on what you’re reporting on and who doesn’t like it.”*

Strategies

Coping Mechanisms

Many journalists attempt to mitigate risks through proactive planning, particularly in

high-risk assignments. In Nigeria, a journalist shared: *“Before covering a protest, I inform colleagues and family about my location. I also ensure I have an exit plan in case things escalate.”* This type of planning helps reduce immediate risks but often relies on individual ingenuity rather than institutional frameworks. Collaborative networks have become an essential coping mechanism, especially for freelancers without organizational backing. In Cameroon, a journalist highlighted the importance of peer support: *“We’ve formed an informal group of journalists where we share tips on safe reporting, legal advice, and even emotional support. It’s our way of looking out for each other.”* These networks serve as critical lifelines, particularly in environments where institutional protections are weak or nonexistent.

Adopting digital security practices is another widespread strategy. In South Sudan, a journalist shared: *“I encrypt my emails and use secure apps for communication. I’ve also stopped saving sensitive information on my devices in case they’re confiscated.”* However, the technical expertise required for these tools often poses a barrier for journalists with limited access to training or resources. To navigate increasing risks, many journalists have expanded their roles, taking on tasks traditionally outside the scope of reporting. In the DRC, a journalist described how they combined investigative reporting with advocacy: *“When I publish stories on human rights abuses, I work with local humanitarian NGOs to amplify the findings and push for action. It helps create a layer of protection.”* This blending of roles reflects a strategic response to reduce isolation and increase impact. Collaboration with international organizations is another innovative strategy. A journalist from Nigeria noted: *“I often pitch my stories to international outlets because they have the*

resources to protect their contributors. It’s not always easy, but it feels safer than working alone.” Such collaborations provide access to legal resources and broader platforms, offering both visibility and protection.

Female journalists often adopt distinct coping strategies to deal with gender-specific threats. A female journalist from Cameroon explained: *“I stopped using my personal phone number for work because of the constant harassment. Now I use a burner phone that I change every few months.”* These measures, while effective in reducing direct harassment, often come at a personal and financial cost. Another female journalist in Nigeria shared how she manages online harassment: *“I’ve learned to disengage. I block accounts and avoid reading abusive comments because it’s too overwhelming. But sometimes, it feels like I’m cutting myself off from my audience.”* This withdrawal from digital spaces limits professional engagement but helps protect mental well-being.

Avoidance is another strategy journalists adopt to minimize threats. Some journalists cope by altering their reporting to align with perceived safety boundaries. In these cases, journalists resort to maladaptive strategies, as a journalist from the DRC explained: *“I avoid directly naming armed groups in my stories because I know it could provoke retaliation. Instead, I focus on broader issues related to the conflict.”* In South Sudan, a journalist also admitted: *“I avoid reporting on government corruption because it’s not worth the risk. I focus on less controversial topics instead.”* While effective in reducing direct confrontation, such approaches often result in self-censorship and limit the scope of critical reporting.

The coping mechanisms adopted by journalists often reflect a balancing act

between maintaining professional integrity and ensuring personal safety. For some, these strategies foster resilience, allowing them to continue their work despite significant challenges. As one journalist from Cameroon summarized: *“You learn to adapt. Every day, you find new ways to keep going because stopping is not an option.”* However, the lack of institutional support often leaves journalists relying on individual strategies that are insufficient to address systemic threats.

Outcomes

Despite significant challenges, many journalists demonstrated remarkable resilience, finding ways to adapt to their environments and continue their work. In Cameroon, a journalist reflected: *“Every threat I face motivates me to find new ways to protect myself and keep reporting. If I stop, the stories of these communities will go untold.”* This determination often stems from a strong sense of duty to inform the public, particularly in regions where information is scarce or suppressed. For others, resilience is bolstered by collaboration and external support. A journalist in Nigeria shared: *“Working with international outlets has given me the resources and visibility to continue reporting. It’s not easy but knowing there’s some form of backup helps me push forward.”* These forms of adaptation allow journalists to navigate risks while maintaining their professional commitments.

One common outcome is self-censorship, as a journalist in South Sudan noted: *“I focus on less controversial subjects now—education, development stories. It’s not ideal, but it’s safer.”* For some, the cumulative effect of threats and insufficient coping mechanisms leads to burnout or withdrawal from the profession entirely, particularly for freelancers without

institutional support. In Nigeria, a journalist recounted: *“Several colleagues have left journalism because the risks became too much. After repeated threats and harassment, they couldn’t keep going. It wasn’t worth the stress and danger.”* This exodus underscores the unsustainable conditions under which many freelancers operate. At a systemic level, the combined outcomes of self-censorship, withdrawal, and compliance contribute to the erosion of press freedom. A journalist in the DRC summarized: *“Every time someone stops reporting on critical issues, it feels like the space for free press shrinks. We’re losing the ability to hold power to account.”* This decline has cascading effects on public discourse and democratic accountability, particularly in regions where journalism serves as a key mechanism for exposing corruption, human rights abuses, and societal inequities.

The psychological toll of persistent threats is another significant outcome. A journalist in Cameroon explained: *“Even when I’m not directly threatened, I feel constant anxiety. The fear stays with you and affects everything.”* This chronic stress undermines both personal well-being and professional effectiveness. Isolation, particularly for freelancers without organizational support, compounds these mental health challenges. A journalist in the DRC noted: *“You feel like you’re on your own. There’s no safety net, no one to turn to when things go wrong.”* This lack of support exacerbates vulnerability and contributes to burnout.

Despite these challenges, some journalists have found ways to turn their experiences into opportunities for growth and innovation. A journalist in Nigeria noted: *“The threats have forced me to think creatively. I’ve started collaborating with other journalists and organizations to ensure my stories are still told, even if I can’t publish them under*

my name.” These adaptations not only protect individual journalists but also help sustain critical reporting in high-risk areas. Similarly, networks of freelance journalists are emerging as collective support systems. A journalist in Cameroon shared: *“By working together, we’ve created a small but strong community that helps each other navigate challenges. It’s not perfect, but it’s a start.”* These networks reflect a growing recognition of the need for solidarity and shared resources among freelance journalists.

Discussion

Systemic Risks

The threats faced by independent, freelance journalists underscore the complexity of navigating societal environments characterized by political instability, diverse conflicts, and weak institutional protections. State actors remain a significant source of these threats, particularly through physical violence, legal harassment, and surveillance. This aligns with trends in the suppression of press freedom, where governments leverage legal and extralegal mechanisms to silence dissent (Jatula, 2019). Non-state actors, including armed groups, insurgents, and societal forces such as online mobs and vigilante groups, emerge as critical sources of threats (Workneh, 2024). The DRC exemplifies the dual pressures of state neglect and non-state aggression, where journalists are targeted by armed groups for perceived bias or association with external entities. The findings also reveal the insidious role of societal forces in perpetuating psychological and digital harassment, particularly in politically polarized contexts such as Nigeria. The intersectionality of threats is notable, with journalists often facing overlapping physical, psychological,

digital, legal, and financial risks. These findings demonstrate how the multidimensional nature of threats exacerbates journalists’ vulnerabilities, creating an environment where safety and professional autonomy are continually compromised (Slavtcheva-Petkova et al., 2024; Høiby and Ottosen, 2016).

The psychological toll of persistent threats reveals the hidden costs of journalism in high-risk environments. Beyond physical harm, the constant fear of harassment, surveillance, or violence shapes how journalists perceive their roles and limits their capacity to function effectively. This aligns with broader research linking exposure to trauma in the field with long-term mental health challenges, including anxiety and burnout (MacDonald et al., 2023; Woodman, 2020; Feinstein et al., 2015). The psychological burden is particularly pronounced for female journalists, who face compounded risks due to gendered harassment (Barão da Silva et al., 2023). Their coping strategies, such as disengagement from online platforms or the use of burner phones, demonstrate resilience but also highlight the unequal toll these threats exact based on gender. The broader societal implications of this dynamic cannot be overstated: when female journalists withdraw or self-censor, it narrows the diversity of voices and perspectives in media coverage.

The coping mechanisms employed by freelance journalists reflect both their adaptability and the structural gaps in the systems meant to protect them (Norbäck and Styhre, 2019). The reliance on personal networks and informal strategies, such as self-taught digital security practices or collective peer support, speaks to the resilience of these

journalists. However, it also exposes the inadequacies of existing frameworks, particularly for freelancers who lack institutional protections (Marín-Sanchiz et al., 2023). The role expansion observed in many journalists, where they take on additional responsibilities such as advocacy, digital security, and fundraising, is a double-edged sword. While it demonstrates innovation and adaptability, it also places an unsustainable burden on individuals, further straining their mental and financial resources. This reflects a larger trend in journalism, where the precarity of freelance work forces individuals to shoulder risks that should ideally be mitigated by institutional structures (Reid et al., 2020; McIntyre et al., 2023).

The outcomes of these coping mechanisms extend beyond individual journalists to affect the broader state of press freedom in the region. Self-censorship, a common response to persistent threats, highlights the chilling effect these environments have on independent reporting (Conroy-Krutz, 2020). The retreat from controversial topics such as corruption or human rights abuses creates information vacuums that weaken public accountability and governance (Sobel and McIntyre, 2020). Withdrawal from journalism altogether is another critical outcome, with experienced reporters leaving the field due to unmanageable risks. This attrition reduces the capacity of the media to report on vital issues and signals a systemic failure to support and protect journalists (Frère, 2014). The long-term implications of this trend are profound, particularly in regions like the DRC and South Sudan, where independent journalism serves as a critical check on power in the absence of robust institutional oversight.

The erosion of press freedom is both a local and global concern. Locally, it undermines the ability of citizens to access accurate information and participate meaningfully in democratic processes. Globally, it highlights the fragility of journalistic ecosystems in regions of conflict and instability, underscoring the interconnectedness of press freedom challenges worldwide (VonDoepp and Young, 2024; Kwoede et al., 2024). This reality also reflects the emerging partnerships between freelancers and nonprofits that are influencing foreign news reporting, since the importance of having a journalist on the ground and ensuring liveness is losing significance (Conrad, 2015).

Policy Implications

This research points to several structural gaps that must be addressed to safeguard freelance journalists. The absence of institutional protections for freelancers is particularly striking. Unlike journalists affiliated with major media houses, freelancers operate without access to legal aid, mental health resources, or safety training. Addressing this gap requires concerted efforts from media organizations, advocacy groups, and international bodies to extend support to independent journalists (Wright, 2016; Conrad, 2015).

The intersectional vulnerabilities faced by female journalists also demand targeted interventions. The findings suggest a need for gender-sensitive safety protocols and support systems that recognize the unique risks faced by women in the field. This includes providing safe reporting tools, fostering supportive networks, and addressing societal stigmas that exacerbate harassment

(Msimanga et al., 2023; Zviyita and Mare, 2024).

Digital security emerges as another critical area of focus. The increasing reliance on online platforms has created new vulnerabilities for journalists, particularly in terms of surveillance and cyber harassment. Training in digital security must become a core component of journalist safety programs, equipping them with the tools to protect themselves and their sources (Thorsen, 2019).

Finally, the role of international partnerships and collaborations cannot be overstated. The findings indicate that working with international outlets and organizations provides freelance journalists with critical resources and visibility, enhancing their safety and amplifying their reporting. Strengthening these partnerships can help mitigate local risks while fostering a more interconnected and resilient global journalistic community (Zhang and Jenkins, 2023; Matthews and Onyemaobi, 2020).

Limitations

While this research provides valuable insights into the threats, coping mechanisms, and decision outcomes experienced by freelance journalists in Sub-Saharan Africa, it is not without limitations. First, the research relies on qualitative data collected through interviews, which, while rich in detail, may not fully capture the breadth of experiences across the region. The purposive sampling method, though effective in targeting individuals with relevant expertise, may inadvertently exclude perspectives from journalists operating in rural or underrepresented areas. Freelancers in such settings might face distinct challenges or dynamics that differ from those documented

in this research, limiting the generalizability of the findings.

Additionally, the study is constrained by its reliance on self-reported data, which is subject to recall bias and personal interpretation. Journalists may underreport or overemphasize certain aspects of their experiences based on their perceptions or the immediacy of recent events. Furthermore, the scope of the study, which focuses on four countries excludes other Sub-Saharan African nations with equally complex media landscapes. These constraints highlight the need for future research to broaden the geographical scope, incorporate quantitative methods, and explore the experiences of journalists in diverse settings to build a more comprehensive understanding of freelance journalism in high-risk environments.

Conclusion

This research has illuminated the precarious and complex realities of freelance journalists in Sub-Saharan Africa, focusing on the intersecting dimensions of threats, coping mechanisms, and outcomes. Operating in politically unstable and conflict-prone environments, these journalists navigate a spectrum of challenges, including physical violence, psychological harassment, digital threats, and restrictive legal frameworks. Despite these risks, freelance journalists remain critical humanitarian and information actors, providing vital insights into corruption, human rights abuses, and other underreported issues. Their work is marked by resilience and ingenuity, but the lack of institutional protections amplifies their vulnerabilities, forcing many into self-censorship or withdrawal.

The findings emphasize the interconnected nature of threats, where overlapping risks exacerbate both immediate and long-term consequences. Freelance journalists employ various adaptive strategies, from digital security practices and collaborative networks to innovative partnerships with international organizations. However, these mechanisms often come at a personal cost, reflecting the systemic inadequacies of current safety frameworks. The outcomes, including resilience for some and withdrawal for others, have profound implications for press freedom and democratic accountability. As experienced journalists leave the field and critical topics go unreported, the erosion of media independence becomes a pressing concern for the global journalistic community.

To address these challenges, there is an urgent need for systemic interventions, including strengthened legal protections, gender-sensitive safety protocols, and robust digital security training. International partnerships and collective support networks also hold promise for bolstering the safety and sustainability of freelance journalism. By highlighting the lived experiences of journalists in high-risk contexts, this research underscores the importance of fostering a global environment where freelance journalists can operate safely and continue their essential work of holding power to account.

References

Adebayo, J. O. (2016). The impact of peace journalism training on journalists' reportage of the 2015 elections in Nigeria: An action research case study. *Communicatio*, 42(3), 361-377.

Apuke, O. D., & Omar, B. (2021). The ethical challenges and issues of online journalism practice in Nigeria: What do professionals and academics think?. *Technology in Society*, 67, 101713.

Ayentimi, D. T., Abadi, H. A., & Burgess, J. (2023). Decent gig work in Sub Sahara Africa?. *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 65(1), 112-125.

Bakkalbasioglu, E. (2020). How to access elites when textbook methods fail: Challenges of purposive sampling and advantages of using interviewees as "fixers.". *The Qualitative Report*, 25(3), 688-699.

Barão da Silva, G., Sbaraini Fontes, G., & Marques, F. P. J. (2023). Risks and resilience in the case of Brazilian female journalists: How women perceive violence against media professionals and cope with its effects. *Journalism studies*, 24(7), 956-975.

Blumell, L. E., & Mulupi, D. (2021). "Newsrooms need the metoo movement." Sexism and the press in Kenya, South Africa, and Nigeria. *Feminist Media Studies*, 21(4), 639-656.

Conrad, D. (2015). The freelancer-NGO Alliance: What a story of Kenyan waste reveals about contemporary foreign news production. *Journalism Studies*, 16(2), 275-288.

Conroy-Krutz, J. (2020). The squeeze on African media freedom. *Journal of Democracy*, 31(2), 96-109.

Feinstein, A., Wanga, J., & Owen, J. (2015). The psychological effects of reporting extreme violence: A study of Kenyan journalists. *JRSM open*, 6(9), 2054270415602828.

- Firdaus, A., Aksar, I. A., & Gong, J. (2024). Small world sampling: Qualitative sample reliability and validity for efficient and effective recruitment of journalists as research participants. *Journalism*, 25(2), 466-485.
- Frère, M. S. (2014). Journalist in Africa: A high-risk profession under threat. *Journal of African Media Studies*, 6(2), 181-198.
- Frère, M. S. (2017). 'I wish I could be the journalist I was, but I currently cannot': Experiencing the impossibility of journalism in Burundi. *Media, War & Conflict*, 10(1), 3-24.
- Gondwe, G., & White, R. A. (2022). Data journalism practice in Sub-Saharan African media systems: A cross-national survey of journalists' perceptions in Zambia and Tanzania. *African Journalism Studies*, 43(2), 21-36.
- Gondwe, G., Ferrucci, P., & Jr., E. (2023). Community Gatekeeping: Understanding Information Dissemination by Journalists in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Journalism Practice*, 17(9), 1902-1918.
- Grossman, L. R. (2017). All the News that's Worth the Risk: Improving Protection for Freelance Journalists in War Zones. *BC Int'l & Comp. L. Rev.*, 40, 141.
- Harrison, J., & Pukallus, S. (2023). The civil norm building role of news journalism in post-civil war settings. *Journalism*, 24(1), 120-138.
- Høiby, M. H., & Ottosen, R. (2016). Reduced Security for Journalists an Less Reporting from the Frontline. In: Carlsson U (ed.) *Freedom of Expression and Media in Transition: Studies and Reflections in the Digital Age*. Oslo: Nordicom, 183–191.
- Hoiby, M., & Garrido, M. (2020). Reconsidering Journalist Safety Training. *Media and Communication*, 8(1), 68-77.
- Hughes, S., Mellado, C., Arroyave, J., Benitez, J. L., de Beer, A. S., Garcés, M., ... & Márquez-Ramírez, M. (2020). Expanding influences research to insecure democracies: How violence, public insecurity, economic inequality and uneven democratic performance shape journalists' perceived work environments. In *Comparing Journalistic Cultures* (pp. 119-139). Routledge.
- Jatula, V. (2019). Media and underdevelopment in Anglophone west Africa. *African Research Review*, 13(2), 13-25.
- Joseph, B., & O'Donnell, P. (2023). The blurring line between freelance journalists and self-employed media workers. *Journalism*, 24(1), 139-156.
- Keeble, R. (2019). Secret, repressive states worldwide and the threat to journalism. *Journalism*, 20(1), 114-117.
- Kwode, P. A. K., Asekere, G., & Ayelazuno, J. A. (2024). The erosion of media freedom in Ghana: A signal democratic backsliding?. *Media, Culture & Society*, 46(1), 112-129.
- MacDonald, J. B., Hodgins, G., Saliba, A. J., & Metcalf, D. A. (2023). Journalists and depressive symptoms: A systematic literature review. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 24(1), 86-96.
- Marín-Sanchiz, C. R., Carvajal, M., & González-Esteban, J. L. (2023). Survival strategies in freelance journalism: an empowering toolkit to improve professionals' working conditions. *Journalism Practice*, 17(3), 450-473.

- Matthews, J., & Onyemaobi, K. (2020). Precarious professionalism: Journalism and the fragility of professional practice in the Global South. *Journalism Studies*, 21(13), 1836-1851.
- McIntyre, K., Abdenour, J., Maduneme, E., & Skjerdal, T. (2023). Investigating the Gap Between Journalists' Role Conceptions and Role Performance in Rwanda and Ethiopia. *Journalism Studies*, 24(12), 1497-1517.
- Mesmer, K., & Jahng, M. R. (2021). Using Facebook to discuss aspects of industry safety: How women journalists enact ethics of care in online professional space. *Journalism Studies*, 22(8), 1083-1102.
- Mesquita, L., & de-Lima-Santos, M. F. (2023). Blurred boundaries of journalism to guarantee safety: approaches of resistance and resilience for investigative journalism in Latin America. *Journalism Studies*, 24(7), 916-935.
- Mpofu, S. (2022). "I'm Described as Good Journalist Because I Am 'Tough'": How Femininity Is Still Considered a Weakness in Zimbabwean Newsrooms. *African Journalism Studies*, 43(3), 30-50.
- Msimanga, M. J., Tshuma, L. A., Matsilele, T., & Jamil, S. (2023). Contending with sexual harassment: A study of Southern African female journalists' experiences. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 01968599231210790.
- Muindi, B. (2023). Psychological and Physical Lived Experiences of Journalists Covering Terrorism in Kenya. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 78(2), 251-266.
- Norbäck, M., & Styhre, A. (2019). Making it work in free agent work: The coping practices of Swedish freelance journalists. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 35(4), 101076.
- Nothias, T. (2018). How Western journalists actually write about Africa: Re-assessing the myth of representations of Africa. *Journalism Studies*, 19(8), 1138-1159.
- Ola, A. (2020). Illegal assaults and treatment of journalists: a big challenge to the journalism profession in Nigeria. *Journal of Aggression, Conflict and Peace Research*, 12(3), 151-161.
- Pate, U. A., & Jibril, A. (2023). Safety training deficiency, threats and adaptive measures among journalists reporting violent conflict in North East Nigeria. *African Security Review*, 32(3), 227-242.
- Pate, U. A., & Jibril, A. (2024). Insurgency in northeast Nigeria: Are journalists safe to report?. *Journalism*, 14648849241245203.
- Peterson, M. A., Smandych, R., Oriola, T., & Kabir Yusuf, M. (2023). Media Reform and Prospects for Peace and Conflict-Sensitive Journalism in Nigeria: A Critical Appraisal of International and African Research on Media and Peacebuilding. *African Security*, 16(2-3), 123-150.
- Reid, J., Skinner, K., & Daniels, G. (2020). Media freedom in South Africa today: unravelling multifarious threats toward a research and advocacy response. *Communicatio: South African Journal of Communication Theory and Research*, 46(3), 1-19.
- Schiffrin, A. (2013). Not really enough: Foreign donors and journalism training in Ghana, Nigeria and Uganda. In *The Future of Journalism* (pp. 321-332). Routledge.
- Schiffrin, A., & Behrman, M. (2011). Does training make a difference? Evaluating journalism training programs in Sub-Saharan

Africa. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 66(4), 340-360.

Skovsgaard, M. (2014). Watchdogs on a leash? The impact of organisational constraints on journalists' perceived professional autonomy and their relationship with superiors. *Journalism*, 15(3), 344-363.

Slavtcheva-Petkova, V., Ramaprasad, J., Springer, N., Hughes, S., Hanitzsch, T., Hamada, B., ... & Steindl, N. (2024). Conceptualizing Journalists' Safety around the Globe. In *Journalism and Safety* (pp. 11-29). Routledge.

Sobel, M., & McIntyre, K. (2020). The state of press freedom in Uganda. *International Journal of Communication*, 14, 20.

Thorsen, E. (2019). Surveillance of journalists/encryption issues. *The International Encyclopedia of Journalism Studies*, 1-7.

Tsarwe, S., & Mare, A. (2019). Journalistic framing of electoral conflict in a politically fragile society: A comparative study of the Zimbabwean weekly press. *African Journalism Studies*, 40(1), 18-35.

Vicente, P. N. (2013). Foreign correspondence from Sub-Saharan Africa: An evolving communicational paradigm shift/Corresponsales extranjeros en África Subsahariana: Un paradigma comunicativo en evolución. *Index. comunicación: Revista científica en el ámbito de la Comunicación Aplicada*, 3(2), 13-35.

Vicente, P. N. (2019). The Nairobi Hub: Emerging patterns of how foreign correspondents frame citizen journalists and social media. In *Journalism and Social Media in Africa* (pp. 36-49). Routledge.

Von Holdt, K. (2014). On violent democracy. *The Sociological Review*, 62, 129-151.

VonDoepp, P., & Young, D. J. (2024). Polarization, Media Professionalism, and Support for Press Freedoms in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Report on Early Results. *Political Studies Review*, 22(1), 232-240.

Waisbord, S. (2022). Can journalists be safe in a violent world?. *Journalism Practice*, 16(9), 1948-1954.

Woodman, S. (2020). "I have suffered death threats and they killed my pet dogs": Mexican journalists work in war-like conditions. Many are suffering terrible mental illnesses because of it. *Index on Censorship*, 49(3), 56-59.

Workneh, T. W. (2024). From state repression to fear of non-state actors: Examining emerging threats of journalism practice in Ethiopia. In *Journalism and Safety* (pp. 267-284). Routledge.

Wright, K. (2016). "THESE GREY AREAS" How and why freelance work blurs INGOs and news organizations. *Journalism Studies*, 17(8), 989-1009.

Zhang, X., & Jenkins, J. M. (2023). Journalism Idealists: Influences on Freelancers in the Foreign News-gathering Process. *Journalism Practice*, 17(6), 1214-1231.

Zviyita, I., & Mare, A. (2024). Same threats, different platforms? Female journalists' experiences of online gender-based violence in selected newsrooms in Namibia. *Journalism*, 25(4), 779-799.