

Shrinking Freedoms

2024 Journalism and Civic Space Status Report

A media monitoring report on infractions on civil rights in Nigeria



Supported by



Kingdom of the Netherlands

Shrinking Freedoms

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Special appreciation goes to WSCIJ team, whose dedication and professionalism ensured the successful completion of this report led by Motunrayo Alaka, Executive Director/CEO of WSCIJ, who initiated and led the programme, designed its framework, shaped its content strategy, and provided final editorial direction that guided the vision.

The Journalism & Civic Space Status Report Committee comprised distinguished media and communications professionals whose diverse expertise enriched the report's depth and perspective. Professor Abigail Ogwezzy-Ndisika of the University of Lagos provided academic rigour and oversight. Juliana Francis of Security News Alert brought expertise in security and investigative journalism. Lekan Otufodunrin of the Media Career Development Network contributed insights on newsroom capacity and media growth. Osita Nwajah, Former Director of Public Affairs, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), offered edits, while Olatunji Ololade of The Nation gave editorial support.

Government institutions — from the Office of the National Security Adviser to the Nigeria Police Force, the judiciary, State Security Services (SSS), Nigerian Army, Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), Nigeria Press Council and others have honoured WSCIJ's invitations to attend meetings, conferences, and dialogues on the Centre's reports, their findings, and possible solutions. We acknowledge this openness as a positive sign of engagement, and we document these encouraging realities alongside the challenges in this report.

Finally, we acknowledge the invaluable contributions of media leadership bodies like the Nigeria Guild of Editors (NGE), Nigeria Institute of Journalism (NIJ), International Press Institute (IPI), news media organisations, journalists, researchers, editors, Non-Governmental Organisations leaders, and other stakeholders whose contributions, work, perspectives and collaborations informed the insights presented in this report. Their commitment to investigative reporting, press freedom, civic engagement, and accountability continues to inspire our mission.



Foreword

The right to freely express, question, and participate in civic life remains one of the most powerful tools of democracy. In Nigeria and globally, however, this right continues to face persistent challenges, with journalists, activists, and citizens often standing at the frontlines of resistance and reform. The 2024 Journalism & Civic Space Status Report by the Wole Soyinka Centre for Investigative Journalism (WSCIJ) continues our deliberate effort to learn, document, analyse, and spotlight the state of these freedoms — because what is not measured is easily ignored.

This year's report, *Shrinking Freedoms*, builds on the insights of previous editions to present an updated account of the pressures and possibilities within Nigeria's civic space. It reflects both continuity and change: continuity in the courage of journalists who persist in the face of threats and change in the evolving methods used to silence them and other citizens. The findings reveal that, while the number of documented violations has slightly declined, the structures that enable suppression, whether legal, political, physical, digital or institutional, remain largely intact.

The WSCIJ believes that strengthening democracy demands more than courage; it requires evidence, collaboration, and persistent solidarity. Through the *Leveraging the Power of the Media to Fortify the Civic Space and Tackle Malinformation* programme, implemented as a collaboration between the WSCIJ and the Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development (CJID), with valued support from the Netherlands Embassy we are building a collective response to the shrinking of civic freedoms. Together, we reaffirm the media's role as both watchdog and bridge — holding power to account while connecting citizens to truth and justice.

We hope that the data, insights, warnings and recommendations in this report will inform policy action, strengthen newsroom and civil society interventions, and inspire collective responsibility for the protection of rights. Nigeria's democratic health depends on how much space citizens and the press have to breathe, to question, and to speak freely.

On behalf of the Wole Soyinka Centre for Investigative Journalism, I commend the dedication of our research and editorial teams, members of staff, our partners, and the journalists whose courage continues to illuminate truth in difficult times. Beyond being a record of what is, may this report serve as a call to action for what must be.

Motunrayo Alaka
Executive Director/CEO
Wole Soyinka Centre for Investigative Journalism



Executive Summary

Shrinking Freedoms – the 2024 Journalism & Civic Space Status Report, WSCIJ’s media monitoring report on infringements of civil rights in Nigeria, highlights notable shifts in the state of civic freedoms. The report continues a vital, evidence-based assessment of Nigeria’s civic space, especially as it relates to media rights and press freedom. It builds on insights from the 2022 report, *Hushed Voices and the Media’s Defence of the Civic Space (2012–2022)*, and the 2023 edition, *Hushed Voices in an Election Year*, offering an updated and in-depth analysis of current trends.

While recorded civic space violations declined slightly from 134 in 2023 to 103 in 2024, the environment for press freedom and civic expression remains fragile. Journalists continued to bear the greatest impact, accounting for more than half of all survivors and victims. The Nigerian Police were implicated in over 65 percent of incidents, underscoring persistent institutional weaknesses and a culture of impunity that undermine democratic values.

The violations were almost evenly divided between violent and non-violent acts, yet media coverage of these incidents remained largely superficial, limiting public awareness and accountability. Geographically, most violations occurred in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja, Lagos, Kano, and Rivers – major centres of political and media activity. Notably, data on whether perpetrators, survivors or victims were male or female were missing in 59 percent of incidents, revealing persistent documentation gaps that obscure the full scope and impact of these violations.

The report also identifies ongoing and emerging threats to press freedom and civic engagement, spotlighting intensified attacks on journalists, activists, and civil society actors. Covering January to December 2024, the assessment tracked infringements affecting citizens, journalists, and human rights defenders nationwide, based on verified media reports and direct testimonies.

Employing Content Analysis (CA), Critical Incident Analysis (CIA), and case study interviews; the research reviewed 103 incidents reported 342 times in 102 news items and one feature. These were published or aired by 28 news organisations, including 12 national dailies, 10 online platforms, and six broadcast stations. It also incorporates firsthand accounts from journalists and activists involved in the August 2024 #EndBadGovernance protests—a defining moment in Nigeria’s civic resistance.

Ultimately, the report concludes that Nigeria’s civic space remains deliberately constrained by coordinated actions of both state and non-state actors. Without urgent institutional and policy reforms, the fundamental rights to protest, report, and participate in civic life will remain at serious risk.



Acronyms

CA	Content Analysis
CIA	Critical Incident Analysis
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CJID	Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development
CPI	Committee to Protect Journalists
DSS	Department of State Services
EFCC	Economic and Financial Crimes Commission
FCT	Federal Capital Territory
FOI	Freedom of Information
IPI	International Press Institute
NUJ	Nigeria Union of Journalists
NSCDC	Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NTA	Nigerian Television Authority
RSF	Reporters Without Borders (From French: Reporters Sans Frontières)
SSS	State Security Services
TV	Television
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WSCIJ	Wole Soyinka Centre for Investigative Journalism



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Introduction

Press freedom and civic participation continue to face mounting threats worldwide. Reporters Without Borders (RSF, 2024) notes that the political authorities responsible for safeguarding these freedoms are increasingly their chief violators. The 2024 World Press Freedom Index shows that the political indicator, one of five used to assess press conditions globally, recorded the sharpest decline, with an average drop of 7.6 points, signalling a worrying trend of democratic backsliding.

Across Africa, this decline mirrors a continent-wide pattern. The 2024 CIVICUS Monitor reports that civic space in nearly 80 percent of African countries is either “obstructed,” “repressed,” or “closed.” Nigeria reflects this reality, ranking 112th out of 180 countries in the 2024 World Press Freedom Index. The country’s civic space remains fragile, characterised by shrinking freedoms, harassment of journalists, suppression of protests, arbitrary arrests, and growing restrictions on expression both online and offline.

According to the Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development’s (CJID) 2025 Openness Index Report, Nigeria’s federal and sub-national media environments remain uneven, with an average openness score of 50.1 percent and many states still ranking below the mid-point in press and civic space protections. Between December 2023 and November 2024, at least 48 violations of press freedom by state security agents were recorded across various states.

A study by Sanusi and Daniel (2024) in Osun State shows that attacks on journalists are often politically motivated, peaking during elections and protests. UNESCO (2024) similarly reports that 85 percent of journalist killings worldwide remain unresolved, fostering fear and impunity. The WSCIJ’s 2023 Hushed Voices in an Election Year further revealed that 90 percent of assaults on Nigerian journalists occurred on duty, underscoring the media’s persistent vulnerability.

Legal and institutional mechanisms have further enabled this shrinking space. Laws such as the Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) Act 2015, the 1979 Public Order Act, and provisions within the Criminal Code continue to be weaponised against journalists, activists, and citizens who challenge authority.

This media monitoring report, *Shrinking Freedoms – The 2024 Journalism & Civic Space Status*, situates these developments within a broader analysis of civic participation, press freedom, and democratic accountability. It examines emerging actors, affected spaces and trends. The report emphasises the urgent need to protect the rights to report, protest, and participate as core pillars of Nigeria’s democratic future.



Methodology

This report assesses civic space violations involving journalists, citizens, activists and other stakeholders in Nigeria, covering the period from January to December 2024. The analysis is based on a comprehensive review of media reports, which served as the primary data source. The methodology focused on identifying trends and patterns in the incidents, including their distribution across months and states, as well as disaggregation by gender and location. The report also categorises the type of violations into violent and non-violent forms, identifying the perpetrators as state or non-state actors. In addition, the study examines the specific venues where these incidents occurred and analyses how they were reported in the media, with attention to volume and genre of coverage.

Using Content Analysis (CA), Critical Incident Analysis (CIA), and interviews, the report monitored a total of 103 incidents which were reported 342 times, comprising 341 news reports and one feature article. 28 media organisations published or aired these, comprising 12 national newspapers, 10 online news platforms, and six broadcast outlets, made up of five television stations and one radio station. The report integrates cartoons and photographs published during the review period to visually illustrate key issues and draws on case studies from interviews with affected journalists and civil society actors to reinforce the analysis derived from media monitoring. In addition, the report includes highlights from direct interventions of the WSCIJ and other stakeholders.

Limitation

A significant limitation was the underrepresentation of radio content. It was difficult to increase the volume of radio-sourced material despite the effort to monitor programmes in real time and track online versions of radio broadcasts during the reporting period. No incidents were captured in few states of the federation based on the reports analysed. This is a gap in strategy used for selecting analysed stories.

In addition, the classification of media actors posed difficulties in analysing specific incidents. In some cases, individuals were referred to by some outlets as bloggers and by others as journalists. This inconsistency reflects a broader issue in civic space monitoring, where allegations of blackmail or unethical conduct are sometimes used to discredit individuals reporting online by labelling them as "bloggers" rather than journalists.

Another limitation of this study is the absence of complete demographic data, particularly regarding the gender of victims and survivors of civic space infringements. In 59% of the recorded incidents, the gender of those affected was unspecified in the media reports analysed. This absence of detailed demographic data hindered a comprehensive gender-based analysis and masked the impacts of civic space infringements on men and women.



Operational Definition of Terms

The following definitions explain how specific terms are applied throughout this document:

Civic space

This is the political, social, physical, virtual, legal democratic environment where citizens and civil society organisations to freely express themselves, associate, assemble, and participate in public life to hold governments and institutions accountable.

Feature

Used in this report to refer to a longer, more detailed media article that offers more insight into events or trends, often including analysis or multiple perspectives.

Incident

Refers to the occurrence of a civic space infringement involving one or more survivors or victims, documented by at least one media organisation. Each incident is treated as a single analytical unit, regardless of the number of media houses that covered it.

State actors

Refers to government bodies or representatives, including the police, military, intelligence agencies (e.g., DSS), or civil servants, implicated in the perpetration of civic space violations.

Non-state actors

In the context of this report, non-state actors refer to individuals or groups not officially affiliated with the state, such as political thugs, unknown assailants, mobs, or private security personnel, who commit civic space infringements.

News item

Refers to a media publication or broadcast covering a specific event or development, typically presented in a standard news format.

Infringement

This is the act of violating, breaching, or encroaching upon a law, right, or agreement.

Analysis of findings

Analysis of Nigerian media coverage of civic space infringements
(January - December 2024)





ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Analysis of Nigerian media coverage of civic space infringement incidents (January - December 2024)

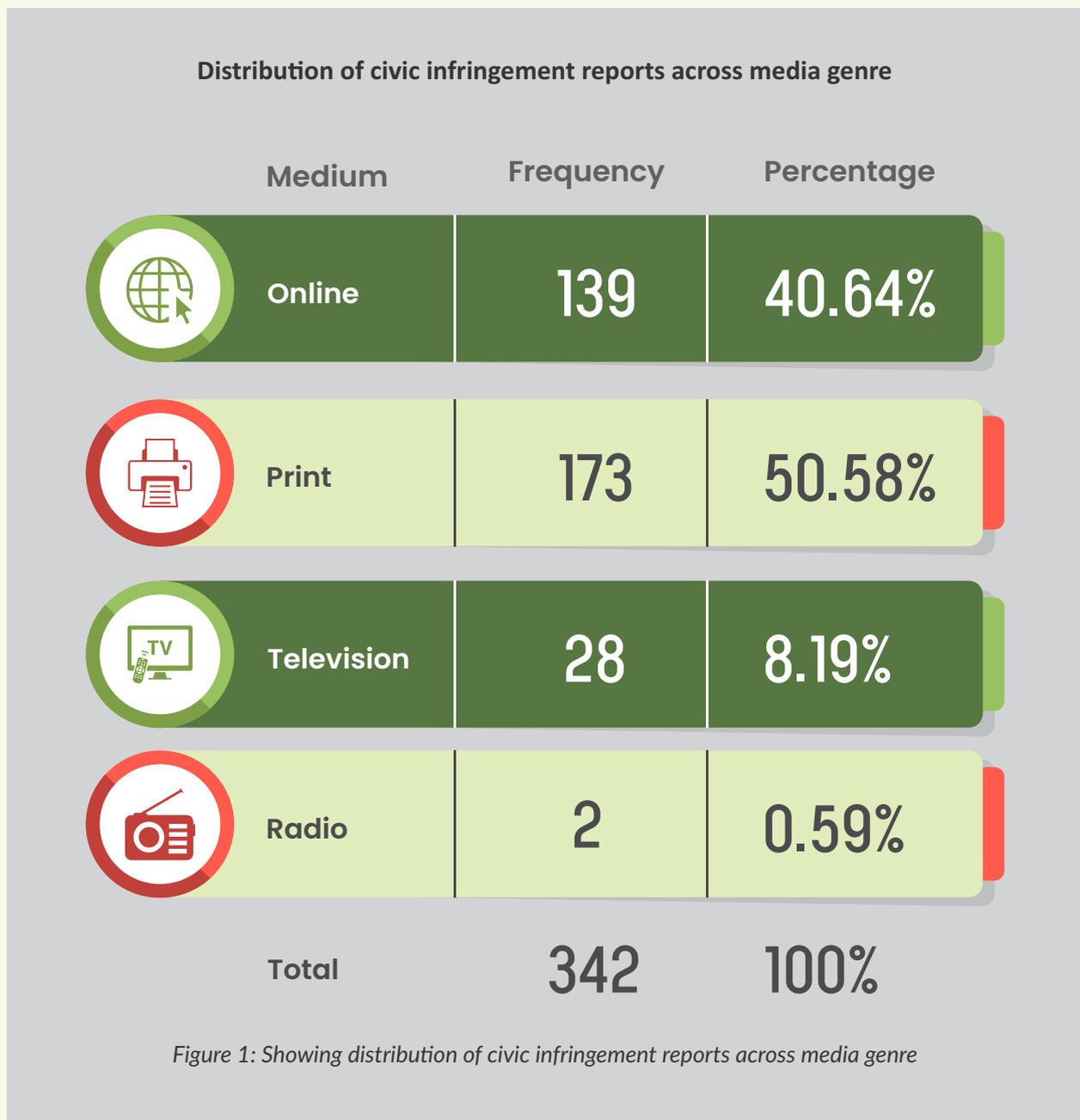
WSCIJ monitored reports on the news media’s coverage of civic space infringement incidents from twenty-eight (28) Nigerian media outlets across print, online, television and radio genres with 342 published reports on 103 civic infringement incidents between January – December 2024. They were: 12 national dailies (*Tribune, ThisDay, Daily Independent, Leadership, Vanguard, The Sun, The Punch, The Guardian, Daily Trust, The Nation, Business Day and Blueprint*); 10 online platforms (*Media Rights Agenda, News Agency of Nigeria [NAN], Solacebase, PM News, Sahara reporters, Premium Times, The Cable, HumAngle, Foundation for Investigative Journalism [FIJ] and Daily Post*); and six broadcast organisations (*News Central, TV360, Nigerian Television Authority [NTA], Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria [FRCN], Channels TV and Africa Independent Television [AIT]*). The report deploys cartoons and photos published within the monitored period to provide imagery and provides case studies from interviews with affected journalists and other civil society actors to substantiate the analysis from the media platforms.

Media organisations monitored



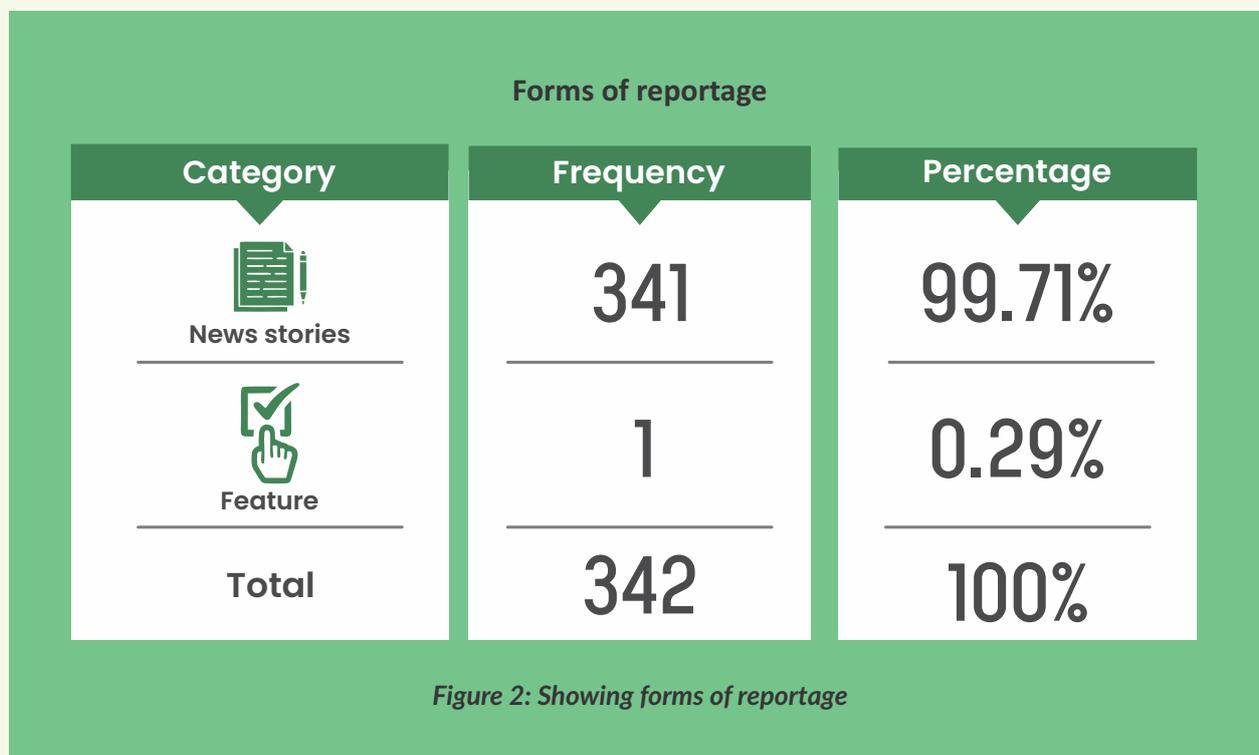
Distribution of civic infringement reports across media genres

A total of 342 reports were documented across four media genres: print, online, television, and radio. Print media accounted for the highest number of reports, with 173 entries representing 50.58% of the total. Online media followed, with 139 reports, representing 40.64% of the total reports. Television recorded 28 reports, contributing 8.19%, while radio had the lowest figure, with just two (2) reports, accounting for 0.59% of the total.



Forms of reportage

Out of a total of 342 reports content analysed, 341 were news stories, accounting for 99.71%, while only one (1) was a feature story, representing 0.29% of the total reportage.

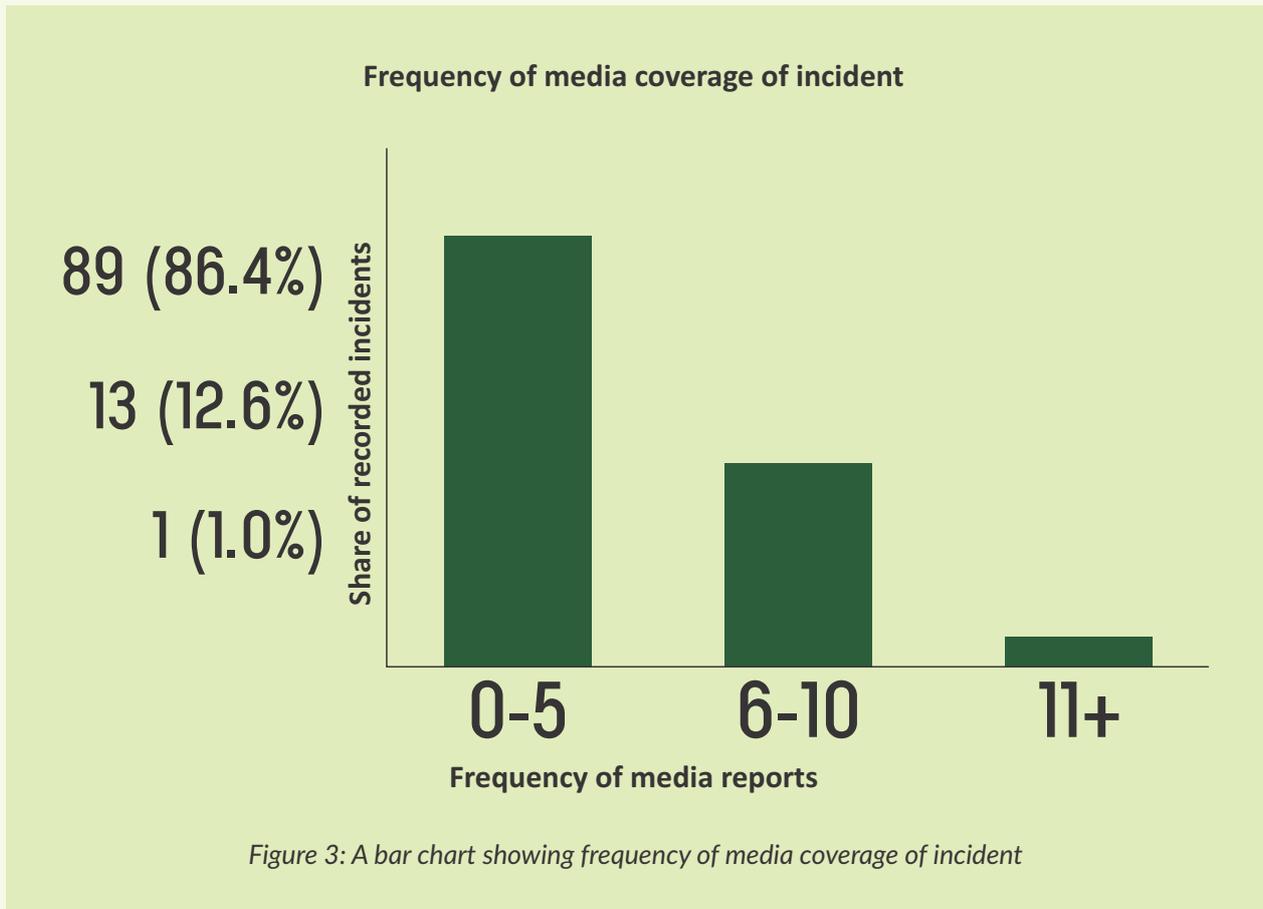


Frequency of coverage of incidents

There were a total of 342 reports covering 103 unique incidents documented across the reporting period from media organisations which ranged from physical assaults and arbitrary arrests to censorship and surveillance. Security agencies, particularly the police, State Security Service (SSS or DSS), and military, appeared frequently in reported infringements. Visibility in the media varied sharply as most of the incidents appeared only once or twice in the 342 published reports.

To provide a clearer understanding of the nature and scale of civic space violations in Nigeria, the reported incidents have been categorised based on the primary form of infringement and the frequency with which they were reported. For a detailed breakdown of all 342 reports of the 103 incidents and their frequency of reportage, please see the extended table in Appendix A.

Out of 103 documented incidents of media infringements in 342 reports grouped for analysis, majority (86.4%) were reported between 0 and 5 times, indicating that most cases received limited media attention. 12.6% of the incidents were reported more than 5 times and only (1%) received between 11- and 15-times media coverage.



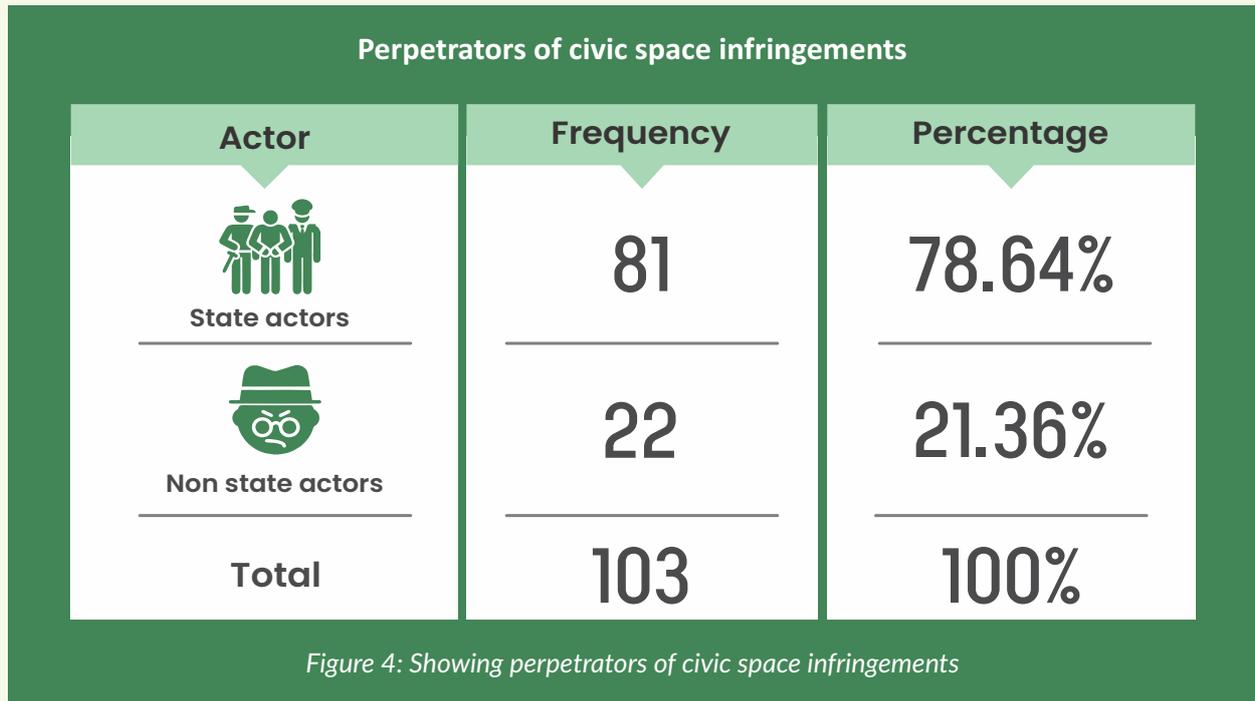
Although the types of incidents were evenly distributed, the data reveals a significant trend of low visibility—an issue that raises serious concerns about transparency and accountability in civic space monitoring. The findings highlight a clear media amplification gap: only 1% of reported incidents received high visibility, reflecting limited follow-through and weak sustained coverage by the media.

Analysis of civic infringement incidents

The 103 incidents of civic space Infringements involve citizens, journalists, protesters, and state or non-state actors in Nigeria.

The state is responsible for the most infringements; everyone else merely fills the gaps.

State actors are responsible for most civic space violations, accounting for 81 (78.64%) of the total 103 recorded cases. Non-state actors are responsible for 22 (21.36%) of the incidents. This suggests that state-linked entities continue to be the primary perpetrators of infringements on civic freedoms.



Data shows police at the centre of repression

An analysis of documented civic space violations by state actors reveals a dominance by the Nigerian Police. Out of the 81 reported infringements by state actors, the Police were implicated in 53 incidents, which constitutes 65.43% of the total. For instance, The Punch newspaper reported on 17 January 2024 that, “Men of the Abia State Police Command ... invaded ABN TV in Umuahia on Tuesday and forcibly arrested a guest, Mr Udensi Donald, during a live programme, Youth Rendezvous, anchored by Grace Onyekachi.”

Next is the State Security Service or Department of State Services (SSS/DSS), which accounted for nine (9) incidents, i.e. 11.11%. Also, the Nigerian Army featured in eight (8) of the incidents, representing 9.87%. Although constitutionally tasked with national defence, its regular deployment in civil contexts suggests an entrenched practice of militarised responses to civilian activities, particularly protests and elections. The Daily Post reported an example of this on Friday, 23 February 2024. According to the story, “Soldiers from the Nigerian Army 3 Battalion in Effurun, Uvwie Local Government Area of Delta State, in the early hours of Friday arrested the South-South Bureau Chief of Galaxy Television, Mr Dele Fasan, for taking video clips at the scene of a planned protest against the economic hardship in the country.”

Other state-level and federal actors contributed to a smaller but still notable share of violations. The Federal Government was linked to three (3) incidents, representing 3.75% of the 81 reported incidents. Both State governments and the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS) were each responsible for 2 (2.46%) incidents.

State actors		
Actor	Frequency	Percentage
 Nigeria Police	53	65.43%
 Nigerian Army	8	9.88%
 Department of State Services (DSS)	9	11.13%
 Federal Government	3	3.70%
 State Government	2	2.47%
 Nigeria Immigration Service	2	2.47%
 Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC)	1	1.23%
 Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC)	1	1.23%
 Defence Intelligence Agency	1	1.23%
 Hisbah Police	1	1.23%
Total	81	100%

Figure 5: Showing state actors involved in civic space infringements



A cartoon by Mike Asukwo, published on the front page of *BusinessDay Sunday*, 25 August 2024. A stern figure in a mock-military robe, brandishing a whip, stands beside a shackled journalist locked and silenced, yet still gripping his pen and notebook in quiet defiance.

Meanwhile, several other security agencies were implicated in one incident each, accounting for 1.23% of the total incidents per actor. These include the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), the Defence Intelligence Agency and the Hisbah Police, respectively.

For example, Blueprint newspaper, on 14 October 2024, reported an incident in which it alleged that armed operatives of the EFCC invaded the broadcast house of Urban Radio Station 94.5FM in Enugu. They allegedly

overpowered the staff, collected their phones, entered the studio, disrupted a live programme anchored by On-Air Personality Favour Eko, and whisked her away.

A journalist with Trust TV, Jamil Mabai, ...narrated how he was detained by the Katsina State Hisbah Corps while at the corps' office on official duty. The journalist explained that he had gone to the Hisbah headquarters for a follow-up interview with the corps' Public Relations Officer, Nafiu Akilu, over an incident involving their officers.

In another incident, reported by Punch Newspaper on 16 May 2024, "A journalist with Trust TV, Jamil Mabai, ...narrated how he was detained by the Katsina State Hisbah Corps while at the corps' office on official duty. The journalist explained that he had gone to the Hisbah headquarters for a follow-up interview with the corps' Public Relations Officer, Nafiu Akilu, over an incident involving their officers."

Violence is outsourced as thugs, touts, and hoodlums do the groundwork

Data on the 22 documented incidents involving non-state actors show that hoodlums, touts, hooligans and thugs, were the most frequent perpetrators. They were responsible for 17 incidents, representing 77.27% of all cases in this category. On this, Solacebase of 13 June 2024 reported that "a cameraman with Trust TV was attacked and almost stabbed by thugs while covering a protest by traders

whose shops were demolished by the Kano State Government. According to Daily Trust, Abdul, who was holding a camera, was hit by a vehicle and was surrounded by thugs who wanted to stab him but was saved by a good Samaritan."

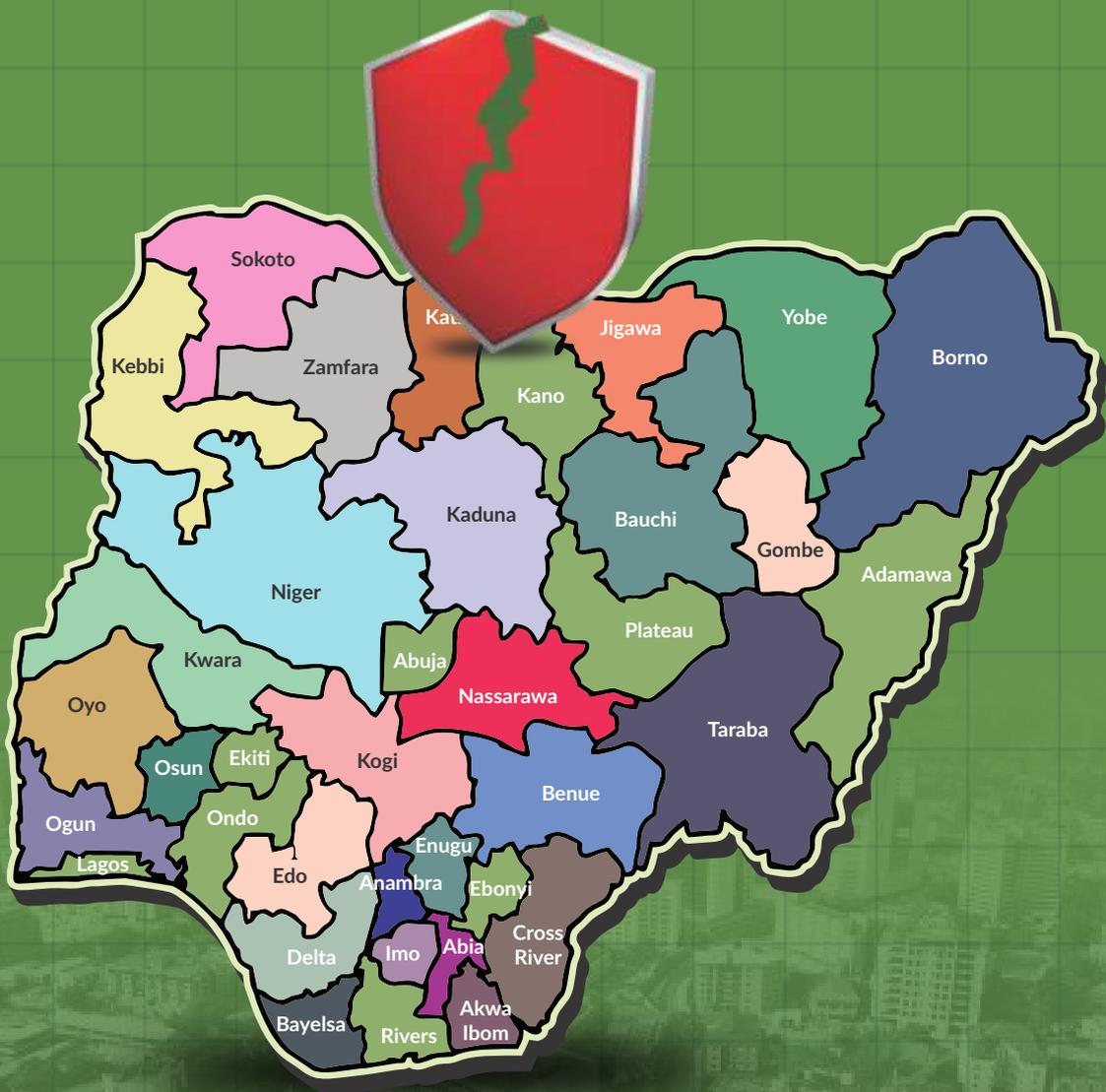
Similarly, unidentified persons were linked to three (3) incidents, representing 13.63%. Out of the non-state actors' group, as others, one (1) involved a suspect in court standing trial. In contrast, another was linked to an individual acting alone. Each accounted for 4.55%. The Nation newspaper reported a critical incident analysis of the case of a suspect in court on 11 February 2024.

According to The Nation newspaper, "the suspects accused of killing the late Village Head of Lambata, Alhaji Muhammad Abdulsafur, ... assaulted the cameramen from NTA and NSTV as well as several other journalists who were present at the Suleja High Court premises to cover the proceedings of their trial. The suspects, who were about 15 in number, threatened the journalists attending the resumed trial of their case, warning them to stop continued coverage of the case. The suspects, who Justice Aisha Bawa Wodu had granted bail, warned that drastic action would be taken against the journalists if they continued to report their court appearances."

Non-state actors		
Actor	Frequency	Percentage
 <p>Hoodlums (Touts, Hooligans, Thugs)</p>	17	77.27%
 <p>Unidentified persons</p>	3	13.63%
 <p>Suspects in court</p>	1	4.55%
 <p>Individual</p>	1	4.55%
Total	22	100%

Figure 6: Showing non-state actors involved in civic space infringements

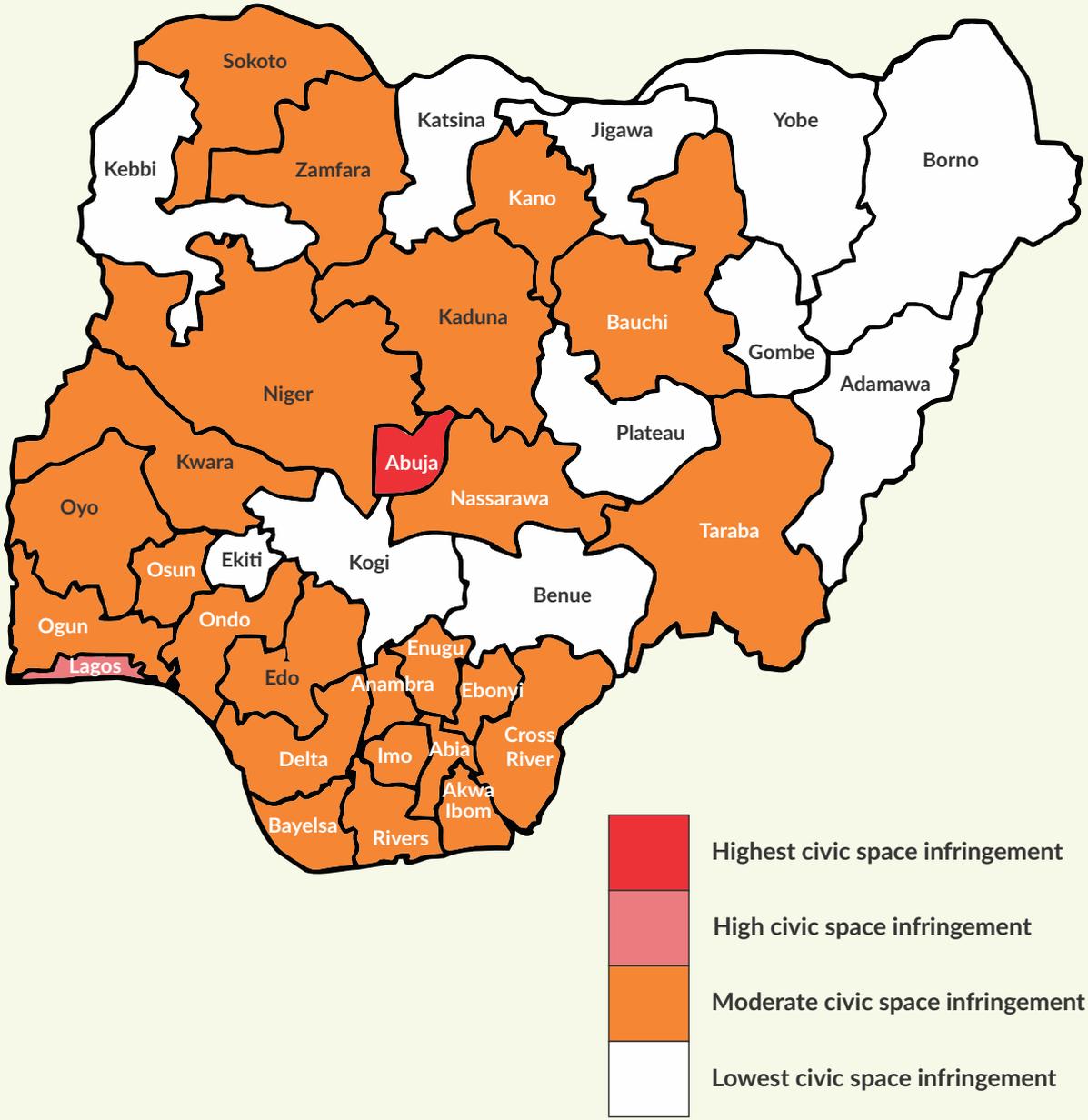
States leading civic space infringements





Abuja leads; Lagos, Kano, and Rivers keep the heat on, while the quieter states appear to be underreported rather than peaceful

An analysis of civic space infringements across Nigerian states reveals that the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, recorded the highest number of incidents, with 23 (22.36%) out of the total 103 documented cases. Lagos State followed with 18 (17.48%) incidents. Kano and Rivers state each recorded seven (7), that is, 6.8% incidents each; while Oyo reported five (5), that is, 4.85%. Additionally, Delta, Kwara, and Ogun states each accounted for 4 (3.88%) of the total; Abia, Anambra, Kaduna, and Ondo each had three (3), that is, 2.91%; while Bauchi, Edo, and Niger each recorded 2 (1.94%).



The FCT emerging as the leading location for civic space infringements points to a worrying trend in the nation's capital, as it was also one of the top three locations in our 2023 Journalism and Civic Space Status Report. Again, the continued presence of Lagos, Kano and Rivers among the states with the highest occurrences also suggests that civic freedom remains under pressure in key political and economic centres in the country.

The FCT emerging as the leading location for civic space infringements points to a worrying trend in the nation's capital, as it was also one of the top three locations in our 2023 Journalism and Civic Space Status Report.

Furthermore, states such as Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo, Nasarawa, Osun, Sokoto, Taraba and Zamfara each recorded just one incident (0.97%). This may be partly due to limited media coverage of civic space infringements in those areas. Additionally, two incidents (1.94%) were reported to have co-occurred across multiple states.

In states such as Adamawa, Benue, Borno, Ekiti, Gombe, Jigawa, Katsina, Kebbi, Kogi, and Plateau, there were no recorded incidents during the reporting period. However, this absence does not imply that infringements did not occur; it mostly simply reflect gaps in media monitoring or underreporting from these locations.

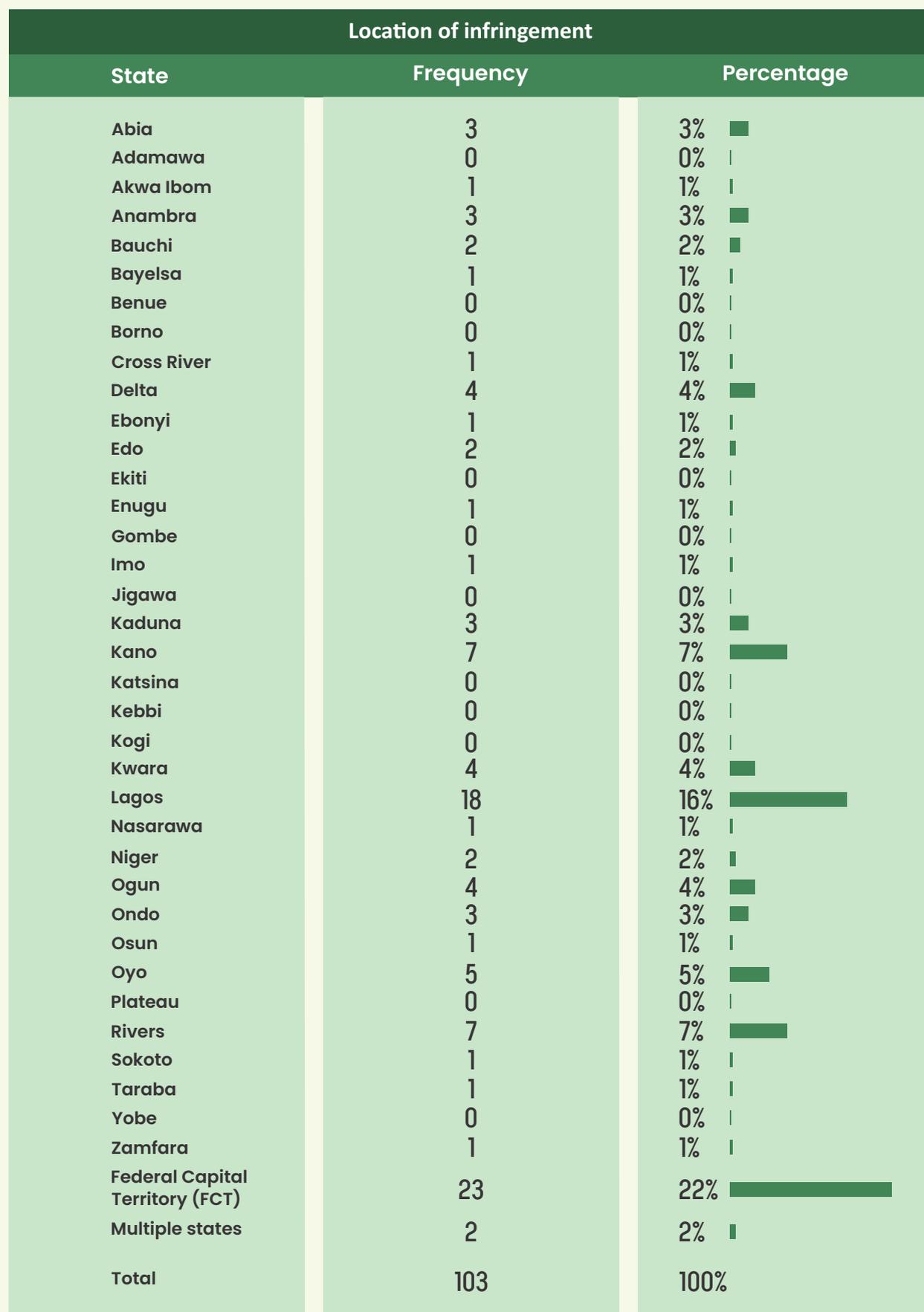
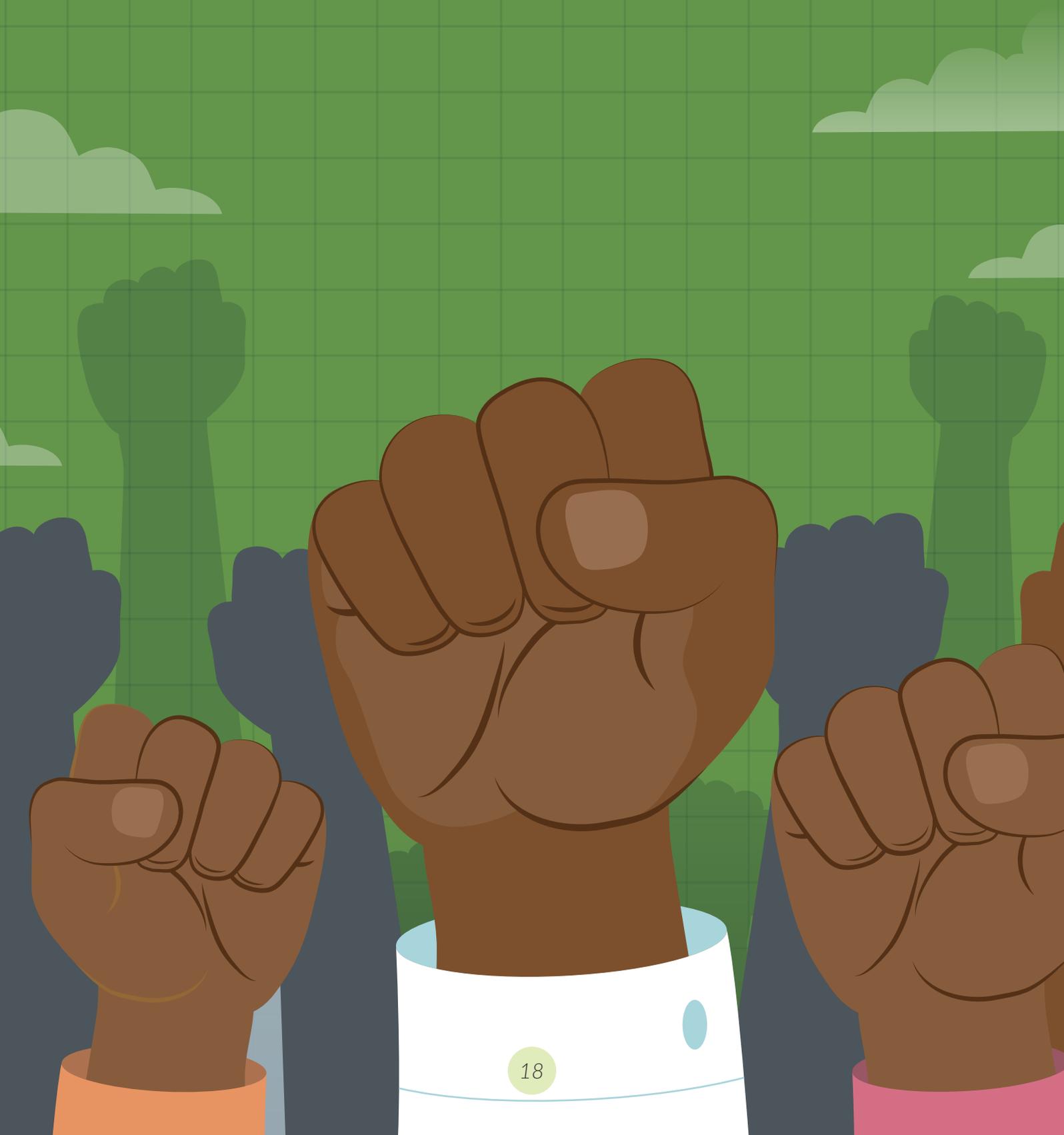


Figure 7: Showing locations of civic space infringements

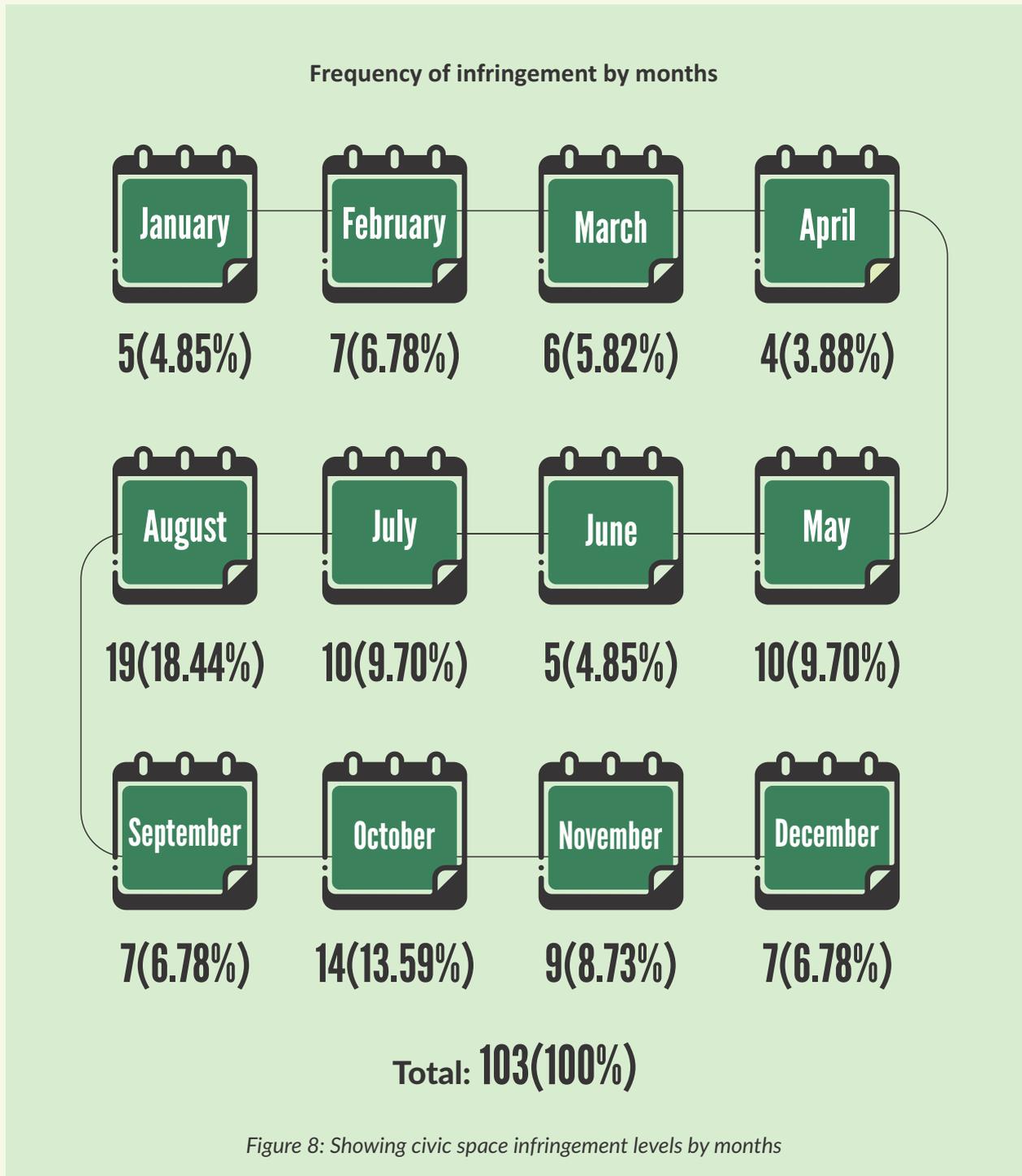
#EndBadGovernance protests spiked incidents





In August the #EndBadGovernance protests spiked incidents

An overview of civic space infringements in 2024 by month shows that August recorded the highest number of incidents, with 19 (18.44%) out of the total 103 incidents. The #EndBadGovernance protests in Nigeria, which took place in August 2024, may have contributed to this spike. According to the Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development's (CJID) Press Attack Tracker, there were 67 recorded attacks on journalists covering the protests in various locations across the country (although available data only accounted for 19 reported cases).



June followed August with 19 incidents (18.44%), while October recorded 14 incidents (13.59%). Similarly, May and July each accounted for 10 (9.70%) incidents. February, September and December each had 7 (6.78%) cases, and March recorded 6 (5.82%). November saw 9 (8.73%) reported incidents, while January recorded 5 (4.85%). April had the fewest cases, with 4 (3.88%).



*“Olopa sir, what’s the protesters’ crime again?”
A cartoon by Leke Moses, published in the Vanguard Newspaper on September 4, 2024, highlighting state-backed suppression of dissent. It depicts the Inspector General of Police (IGP) firing tear gas at protesters while reassuring a political figure with the words, “Relax baba, we’re in this together.”*

Furthermore, some critical incident analyses of reported civic space infringements by state and non-state actors buttress the findings from content analysis. For instance, on 2 August 2024, TheCable newspaper featured an article detailing some of the attacks on journalists. In one of such attacks, Olukayode Jaiyeola, a photojournalist with The Punch Newspaper, was attacked by a Police officer allegedly working with the office of the National Security Adviser during the #EndBadGovernance protest.



Photojournalist Olukayode Jaiyeola lies on the ground moments after being attacked by a police officer during the #EndBadGovernance protest. Photo credit: Deji Lambo

In an interview, Emmanuel Agbo, a journalist who covers the Lagos Metro, as well as judiciary, civil and anti-corruption beats for Premium Times, narrated his ordeal.

He said:

Before you know it, they started firing. Under a culvert that passed through the stadium, that was where most of us were lying down. At the end of the day, when the situation became calm, we stood up. They said, oh, these are journalists, but they saw us with vests, and they kept firing at us. But when we stood up, that was when they said, "Oh, these are journalists!" The last one that shocked me was the last time I went out there. We were inside a car. On that day, the DSS, not the Police, were on the ground. Police used to fire canisters of tear gas, but the DSS fired live bullets. These live bullets were shot at our vehicle.

(DSS shot live bullets at us - Mr Emmanuel Agbo. See Appendix A)

Civic space infringements took more non-violent forms

Civic space infringements during the period under review took both violent and non-violent forms, with a slight predominance of non-violent actions. Of 103 reported incidents, 55 (53%) were non-violent in nature. These included actions such as arrests, detentions, obstruction of duties and legal intimidation; measures that, while not physically aggressive, still undermine the ability of individuals and organisations to participate freely in civic life.

Violent forms of infringements accounted for 48 incidents, that is, 47% of the total. These involved physical assaults, teargassing, abductions, threats, and even killings. The use of force in these instances illustrates the extent to which violence continues to be employed as a tool to suppress dissent.

Arrest, detain, obstruct, intimidate

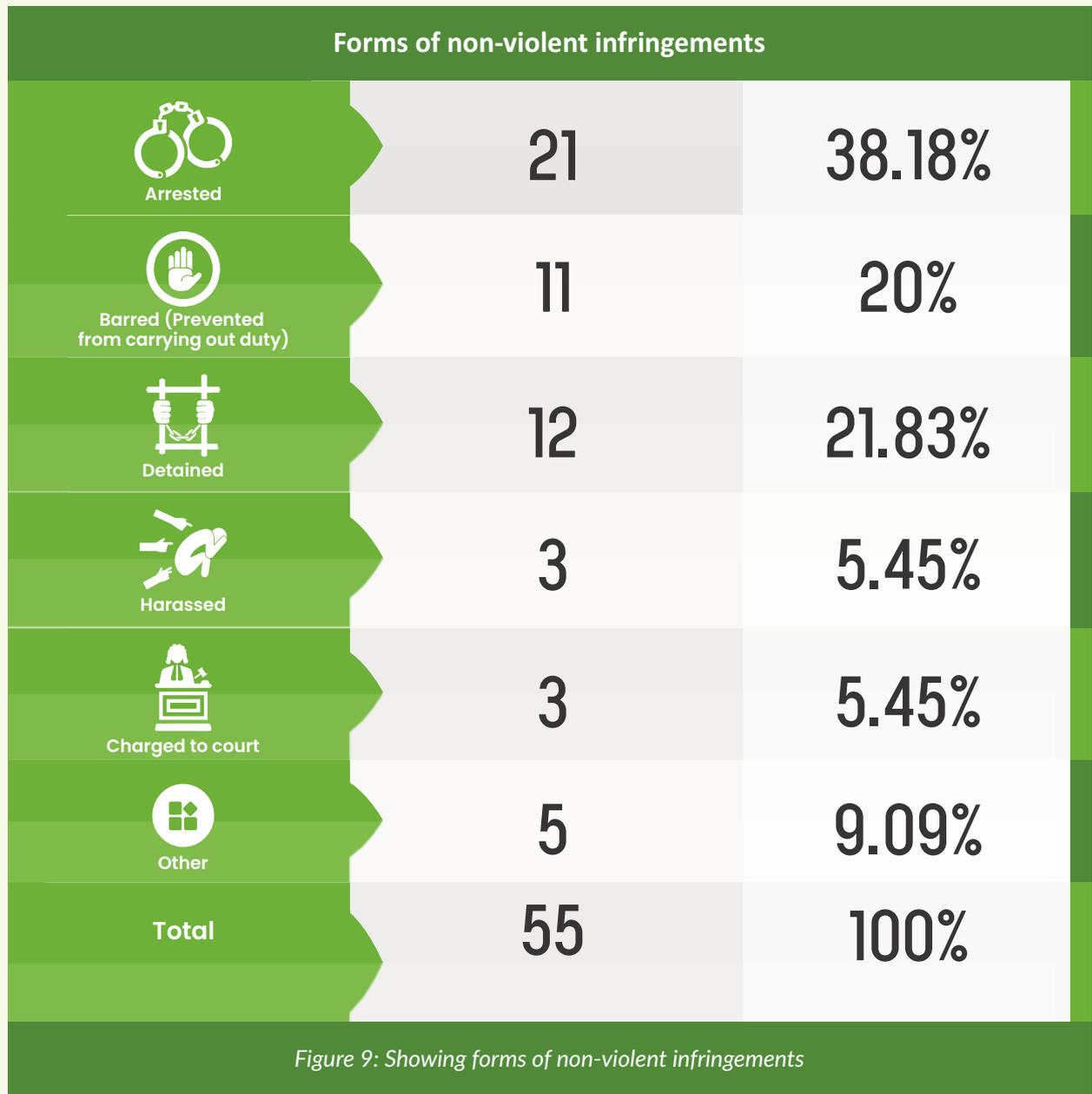




Arrest, detain, obstruct, intimidate: the quiet tools that silence citizens

An examination of the forms of non-violent civic space infringements reveals a pattern of systemic suppression that hinders civic actors' ability to participate freely. Among the 55 incidents reported, arrests were the most prevalent, accounting for 21 (38%) incidents. These incidents often involved journalists, activists, and protest organisers, who were taken into custody without clear legal grounds.

Detention accounts for 12 (22%) incidents. These typically followed arrests and involved individuals being held in custody for prolonged periods, sometimes without access to legal representation. An instance was reported by TV 360 on 9 May 2024. According to the report, Daniel Ojukwu, a reporter with the Foundation of Investigative Journalism (FIJ), was arrested in Lagos and later transferred to Abuja following his report about alleged financial mismanagement of 147 million Naira involving a senior government official.





Daniel Ojukwu (centre) shortly after regaining his freedom, 10 days after his arrest by the police. Photo credit: ICIR

Another primary form of infringement was the deliberate obstruction of journalists in the course of their duty. In 11 incidents (20%), journalists were denied access to events or stopped from filming or reporting an incident.

In an interview, Bernard Akede, a lead correspondent at News Central Television, narrated his ordeal during the #EndBadGovernance protest. According to him: “We mounted our cameras as usual and started the live broadcast; a Police officer came and stopped us halfway through the broadcast...pulled my camera operator away.” (Police stopped our live broadcast -Bernard Akede. See Appendix A)



Screenshots of Bernard Akede, Head of Reportorial, News Central TV being harassed while giving a live report on TV. Credit: News Central TV

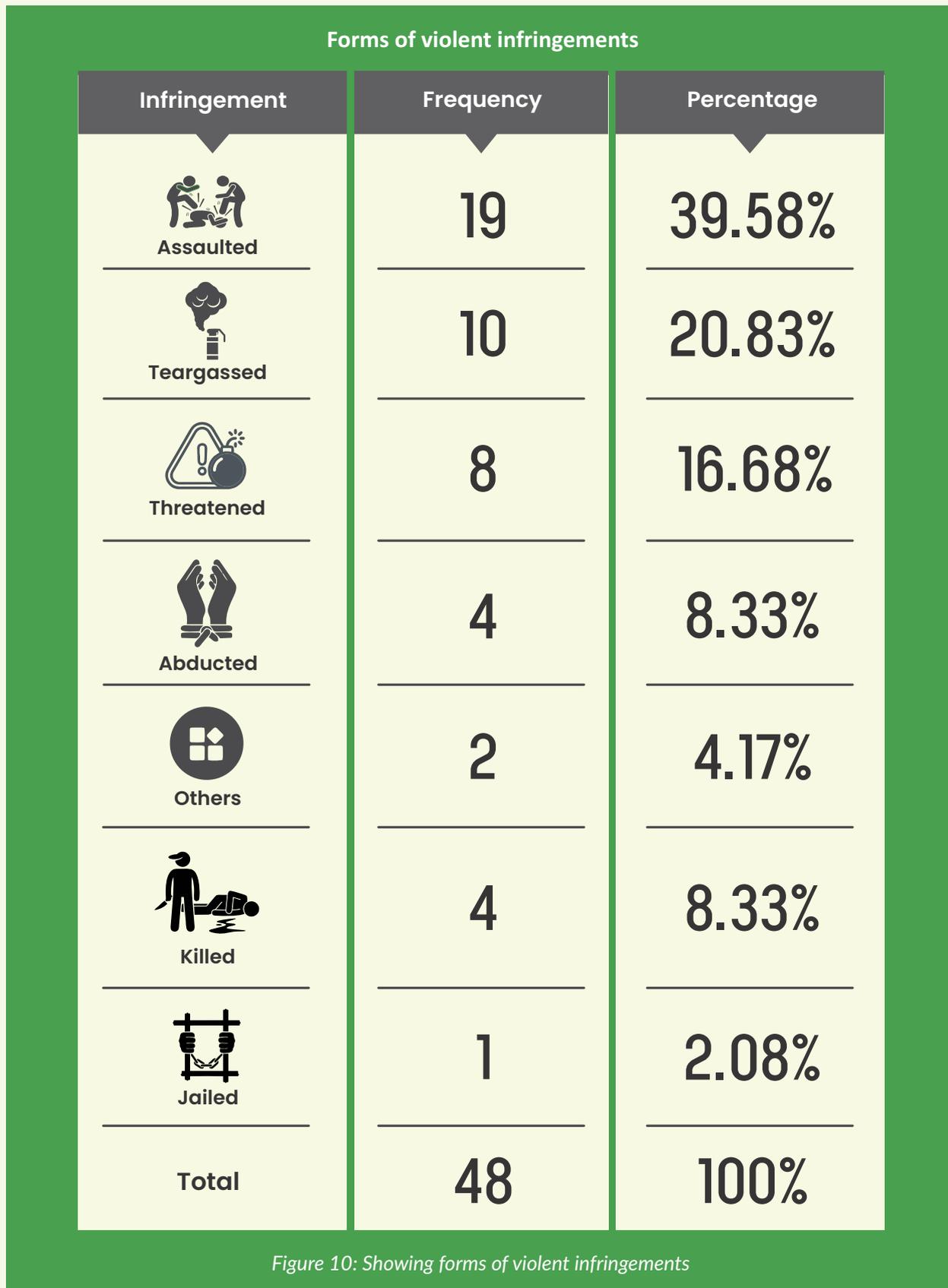
Instances of harassment were recorded in three (3) incidents, that is, five per cent (5%) of the total. Legal persecution also featured among the non-violent infringements, with three (3) incidents, (5%) of the cases involving journalists being charged in court. A 9 February 2024 report by Premium Times captured one incident thus: “On Tuesday, police officers arrested Azeez, managing director and Ayatullahi, editor-in-chief, of the privately owned The Informant247 news website, over reports published on 10 November and 1 February about corruption at Kwara State Polytechnic, Ayatullahi and Taofeek, the outlet’s publisher, told CPJ by phone.”

On Tuesday, police officers arrested Azeez, managing director and Ayatullahi, editor-in-chief, of the privately owned The Informant247 news website, over reports published on 10 November and 1 February about corruption at Kwara State Polytechnic, Ayatullahi and Taofeek, the outlet’s publisher, told CPJ by phone.

A category, labelled as “Others”, accrued five (5) occurrences representing nine per cent (9%) of the reported infringements that included instances of surveillance on the office of a civil rights organisation, as well as the pre-emptive banning of a planned procession before it could take place.

Assaults, tear gas, and abductions remain a familiar script.

Violent infringements on civic space continued to be a significant concern during the period under review. A total of 48 incidents involving the use of physical force or threats were documented.



Assault was the most common form of violent infringement, recorded in 19 (40%) instances. These assaults were often directed at journalists, protesters and human rights defenders during demonstrations, public events or while performing professional duties. An example of this was reported in TheCable on 22 June 2024. According to the report, “Gabriel Idibia, a journalist with the Daily Times, was reportedly brutalised for taking pictures of cattle shepherded by police. He was then detained and brutally beaten. Mr Idibia insists that the physical torture severely affected his eyes, forcing him to access eye treatment.”

Also in an interview, Jide Oyekunle, the Chairman of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Correspondents Chapel, narrated his ordeal while covering the #EndBadGovernance protests in Abuja.

He said:

The Commissioner of Police sighted me with my camera, taking pictures... He shouted at me, Why am I here? Why did I come to Eagle Square? I told him we were journalists and that we came to cover the protest. I told him I'm the NUJ chairman of the FCT Correspondent Chapel. He said I should give him my phone. He collected my phone, and I didn't argue. He dragged my neck and handed me to other police officers who followed him. They were dragging me like a common criminal. While other journalists were covering the action. I was arrested and pulled into their van.” (I was assaulted, arrested - Jide Oyekunle. See Appendix A.



Jide Oyekunle, Daily Independent Newspapers journalist and the chairman of the correspondents' chapel of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) in Abuja being taken away by a police officer during the #EndBadGovernance protest in Abuja. Photo Credit: TheCable

Furthermore, the use of teargas featured in 10 (21%) of the incidents. Tear gassing has been frequently used in contexts where protesters were peaceful or where media workers were merely observing events. Threats were reported in eight (8) incidents, that is, 17% of the cases. These included death threats, menacing phone calls and veiled warnings issued to journalists and activists. Four (4) incidents of abductions were recorded, representing 8% of the total. There were four (4) reported incidents (8%) of murders related to civic space activities. These fatalities represent the extreme form of infringement and illustrate the dangerous environment in which civic actors operate.

In addition, two (2), that is four per cent (4%), of the incidents were categorised as "Others" and included acts such as physical intimidation that did not amount to full assault, or violent disruptions of meetings and gatherings.

Finally, one (1), that is, two per cent (2%), of the incidents involved imprisonment following conviction or summary sentencing. Although this may appear less common, it highlights instances where the justice system was used to legitimise violence through state authority.

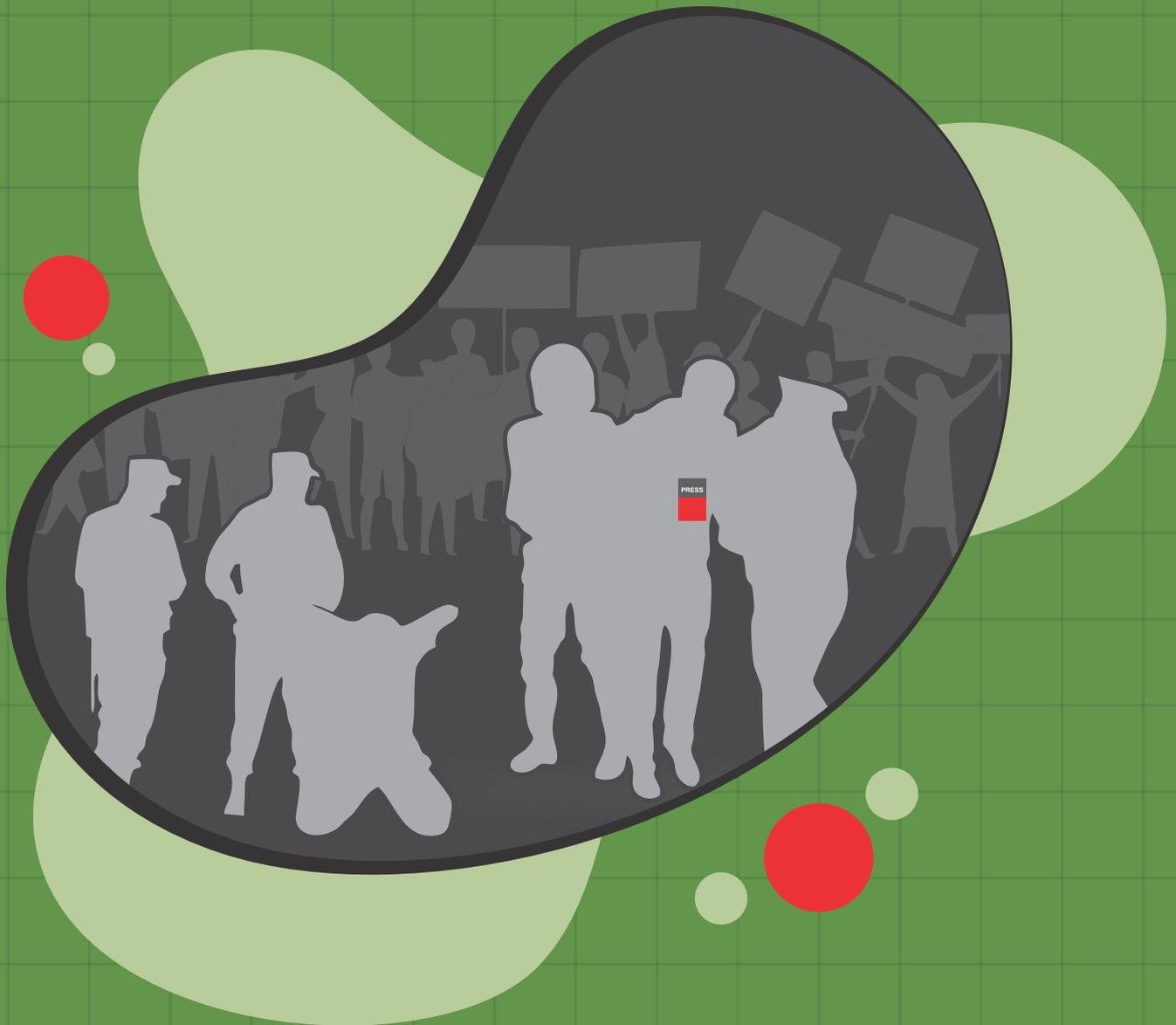


'Press Oppressed' by Victor Asowata and published in The Will newspaper, shows a journalist curled up behind bars, with a broken camera and notepad by his side. The cartoon also depicts the image of a sword stabbing through a fountain pen, ink spilling out like blood.

A 9 February 2024 report by Premium Times captured one incident thus:

"On Tuesday, police officers arrested Azeez, managing director and Ayatullahi, editor-in-chief, of the privately owned The Informant247 news website, over reports published on November 10 and February 1 about corruption at Kwara State Polytechnic, Ayatullahi and Taofeek, the outlet's publisher, told CPJ by phone."

Highlights of WSCIJ direct interventions to address civic space infringement



“We are not your enemies”: The Nigeria Police defends its civic space record

Despite being consistently identified as the lead perpetrators in civic space infringements across Nigeria, the Nigeria Police Force insists it is both misunderstood and misrepresented. At the public presentation of the 2023 Journalism & Civic Space Status report public presentation which held along with the 2024 Civic Space Guard Conference organised by the WSCIJ in Abuja on Wednesday 30 October 2024, Muiyiwa Adejobi, Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), offered a defence of the police’s role in civic enforcement and drew a sharp line between perception and what he described as “the operational realities” of policing in Nigeria.

He said:

The moment a policeman is in uniform, everything he does is seen as oppression. We are law enforcers, not lawmakers. You say we arrested someone for cyberstalking under the Cybercrime Act, and the next headline is “Police stifles press freedom”. But we didn’t write the law. If the law is not good, change it.



From left to right: Members of the first panel session titled “Protecting civic space: The intersection of free press, investigative journalism, technology and democracy,” Nten Ekpang, Editor, Trust TV; Hauwa Shaffi Nuhu, Managing Editor, HumAngle; Mojirayo Ogunlana, Executive Director, DiGiCiViC Initiative; Chido Onumah, Coordinator, AFRICMIL and Olumuyiwa Adejobi, Force Public Relations Officer, Nigeria Police Force

Addressing incidents where journalists were harmed or detained during protests, Adejobi urged reporters to identify themselves in the field clearly. He argued that misidentification often occurs because journalists fail to wear press jackets or carry identification while covering chaotic scenes.

If you're a journalist, wear your jacket. Let us know. When bullets are flying and you're in mufti, how do we know you're not part of the protest? Sometimes, those protesting are regular people. Fine. But when hoodlums take over, when things go wrong, who do you call? The same Police. So don't see us as your problem. If a protest becomes violent, we can't fold our arms. We must intervene.

Adejobi nevertheless acknowledged the Nigeria Police Force's image problem. According to him, efforts are ongoing to reform the institution's internal culture, training approach and public engagement mechanisms. He pointed to updates in the Police training curriculum, which now include modules on human rights, media relations and crowd control.

He argued that while Police reform is a process, it cannot succeed in a vacuum. For these changes to take root, he believes civil society actors, journalists and the public must also play their part.

To that end, Adejobi called for structured engagement and mutual understanding between media professionals and the police.



L-R: Motunrayo Alaka, Executive Director/CEO, Wole Soyinka Centre for Investigative Journalism (WSCIJ); Olumuyiwa Adejobi, Force Public Relations Officer, Nigeria Police Force and Anneloes Hoff, Political Secretary, Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands at the Civic Space Guard conference of the Wole Soyinka Centre for Investigative Journalism held at the Centenary Hall, Ibetu Hotels, Apo, Abuja on 30 October 2024

Stakeholders demand collaboration to ensure journalists' safety and protect civic space.

On 21 November 2024, the Wole Soyinka Centre for Investigative Journalism (WSCIJ) convened a high-level meeting in Abuja, bringing together representatives from security agencies, the media, civil society, the legal community, and other stakeholders. The meeting highlighted the urgent need to protect journalists and safeguard Nigeria's civic space.

In her opening remarks, Motunrayo Alaka, Executive Director/CEO of WSCIJ, drew attention to the rising threats to journalists, citing findings from WSCIJ's 2023 Journalism and Civic Space Status Report that revealed over 90% of attacks occurred while journalists were on duty, often at polling units or protest grounds. She warned that a society where journalists fear their safety will lack democratic values.

Delivering the keynote on behalf of National Security Adviser Nuhu Ribadu, Major General Samad Akesode, acknowledged tensions between the media and security agencies. He encouraged fact-based reporting while cautioning against sensationalism that could threaten national security. Stakeholder at the gathering stressed the importance of regular engagements and trust-building.



L-R: Major General Samad Akesode, Representative of the National Security Adviser (NSA), Director of Communications office of NSA, with Motunrayo Alaka, Executive Director/CEO, Wole Soyinka Centre for Investigative Journalism (WSCIJ), during the Wole Soyinka Centre for Investigative Journalism, High-Level Stakeholders Meeting on Safety of Journalists and Robust Civic Space, held in Abuja on Thursday, 21 November 2024

Media professionals at the meeting did not mince words about the current climate. Richard Akinola, Executive Director of the Centre for Free Speech, lamented that little progress had been made since a similar 1986 dialogue between journalists and the DSS. Others decried the retaliation faced by media houses for previously published reports, with some reporters barred from future assignments based on editorial history.

Zainab Okino, Chair of the Editorial Board at Blueprint Newspaper, described the psychological harassment of media professionals, including opinion writers who routinely receive anonymous, threatening calls that lead to unconscious self-censorship. Musikilu Mojeed, Editor-in-Chief of Premium Times and President, International Press Institute, Nigeria, highlighted the disturbing gap between the promises made by senior officials of government and the actions of personnel on the ground, describing the problem as systemic and in need of urgent institutional correction.



L-R: Deputy President Guild of Corporate Online Publishers Danlami Nmodu (2nd left), Executive Director, PR Nigeria, Yushau Shuaib; Deputy Director Planning National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), Manfred Anusim; Chairperson, Editorial Board, Blueprint Newspaper Zainab Suleiman Okino; Executive Director/CEO, Wole Soyinka Centre for Investigative Journalism (WSCIJ), Motunrayo Alaka; Representative of the National Security Adviser (NSA), Director of Communications office of NSA, Major General Samad Akesode; Chairman Centre for Crisis Communication, Major General Chris Olukolade (Rtd); National Vice President, Nigeria Association of Women Journalists (NAWOJ), Zone D, (North Central), Chizoba Ogbeche, and other guests during the Wole Soyinka Centre for Investigative Journalism, Civic Space Guard Project, High-Level Stakeholders Meeting on Safety of Journalists and Robust Civic Space, held in Abuja on Thursday, 21 November 2024

Adding to the policy conversation, Femi Falana, SAN, condemned the continued use of repealed laws and baseless terrorism and treason charges to detain journalists. He called on the Office of the National Security Adviser to immediately direct security agencies to desist from charging journalists under obsolete laws.

A key outcome of the meeting was the drafting of a communiqué that called for repealing obsolete laws, implementing institutional reforms, and enhancing synergy between the media and security agencies.

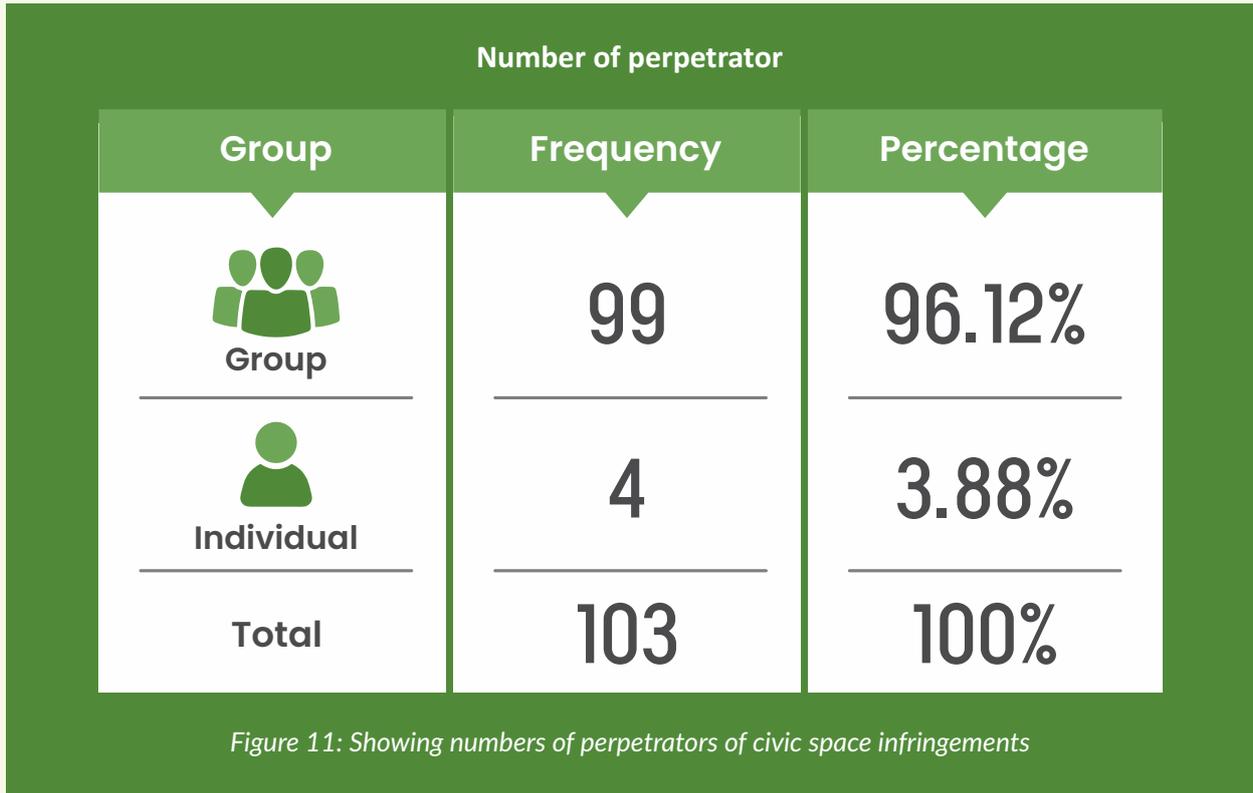
Analysis of findings (continued)





Organised groups commit most civic space violations.

An analysis of the perpetrators behind civic space infringements reveals that groups rather than individuals carried out most incidents. Out of the 103 documented incidents, 99 (96%) involved coordinated actions by entities such as security agencies, mobs, political thugs, or state and non-state actors operating in groups. Only four incidents (4%) were linked to individuals acting alone.



Journalists bear the brunt of civic space infringements .

A breakdown of the victims/survivors of civic space infringements reveals that journalists remain the most targeted group. Out of the 103 incidents, 57 (55%) involved journalists who were attacked, arrested, threatened, or obstructed while carrying out their professional duties. Citizens accounted for 36 (35%) of the total cases. These were primarily people with no formal affiliations, exercising their right to assemble or express dissent.

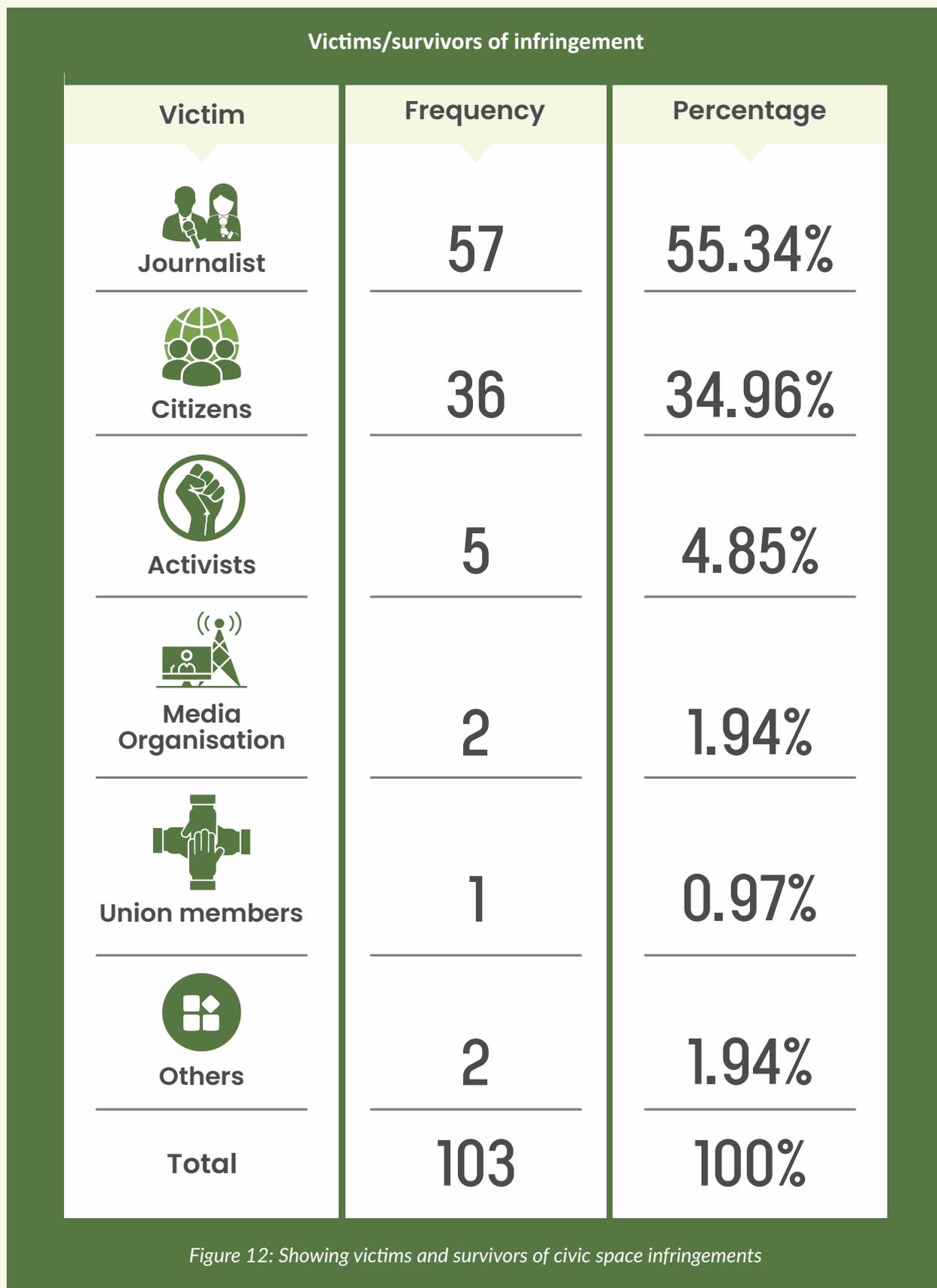
These victims/survivors were targeted during protests. This was evident in the excerpts from The Sun newspaper of 1 August 2024. According to the report, “Over 15 people, who sustained varying degrees of bullet wounds, are in critical condition and have been taken to local health facilities, including Gwagwalada Specialist Hospital, for treatment. The incident began when youths gathered at Suleja Old Motor Park for a peaceful protest despite early morning rain. Police, led by the Area Commander, tried to disperse them. The youths resisted, claiming their protest was lawful and peaceful.” Hospital, for treatment. The incident began when youths gathered at Suleja Old Motor Park for a peaceful protest despite early morning rain. Police, led by the Area Commander, tried to disperse them. The youths resisted, claiming their protest was lawful and peaceful.”

In contrast, activists, that is, individuals actively involved in civic mobilisation, advocacy, or rights campaigns, had their rights infringed in five (5) cases; that is, five per cent (5%) of the cases. Media organisations were also affected in two (2) or 2% of the cases.

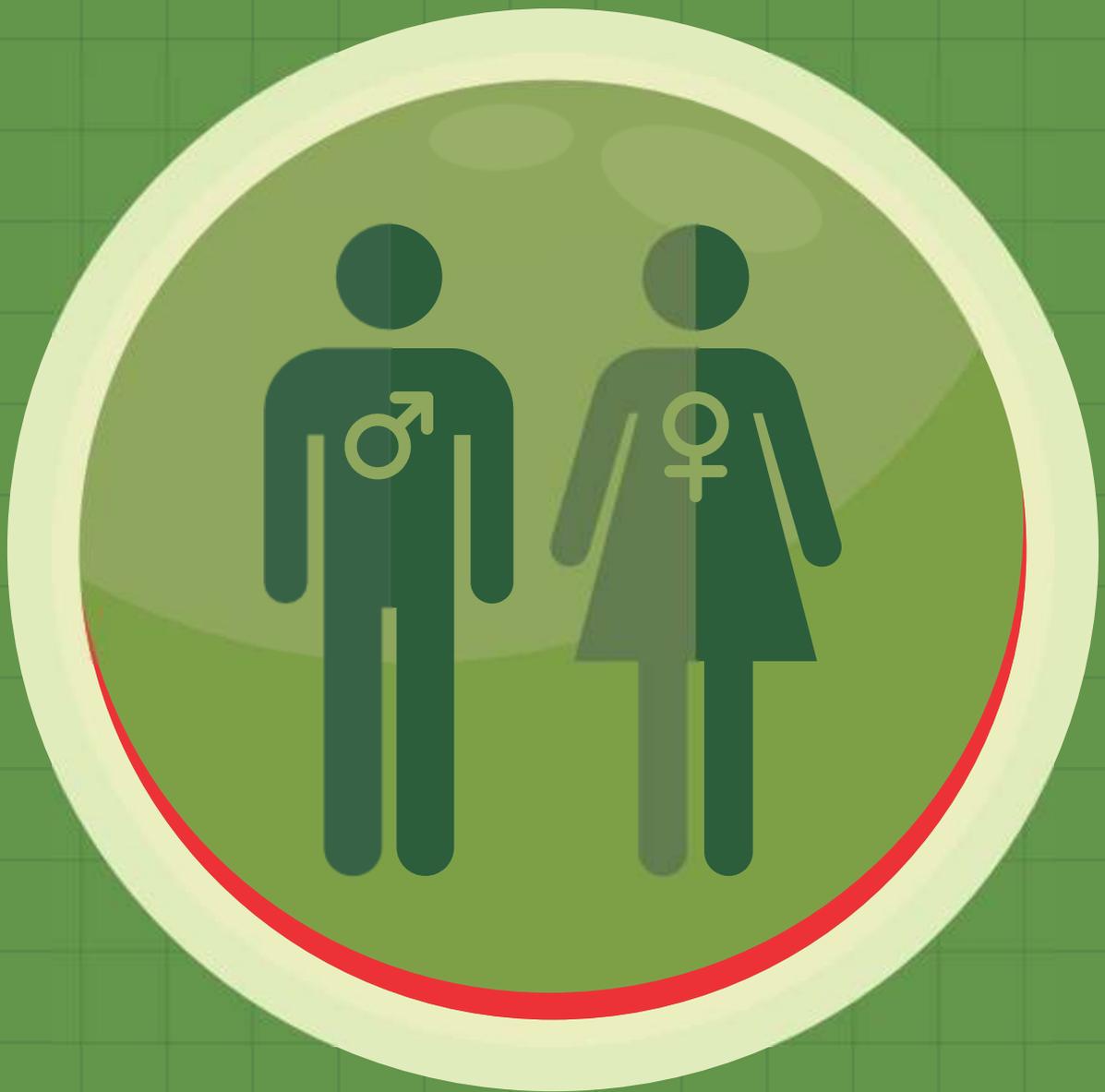
On 17 January 2024, Premium Times reported that “The police in Abia State, South-east Nigeria, stormed a television station ABN TV and arrested a guest, Udensi Donal, during a live programme...During the police invasion, some of the station’s broadcast equipment was damaged, including a laptop, camera, and microphones.”

Finally, victims/survivors of civic space infringements, the Police targeted union members in one (1) instance, representing 1% of the cases. According to a report by Channels Television, aired on 5 March 2024, Union leaders from the Public Complaint Commission who were invited for questioning following a peaceful industrial protest in Abuja were subsequently detained by police, who threatened to charge them with assault and destruction of public property.

The remaining two (2), which represent 2 per cent (2%) and are classified as “Others,” refer to individuals or groups not captured under the main categories but who nonetheless suffered infringements on their civic rights.

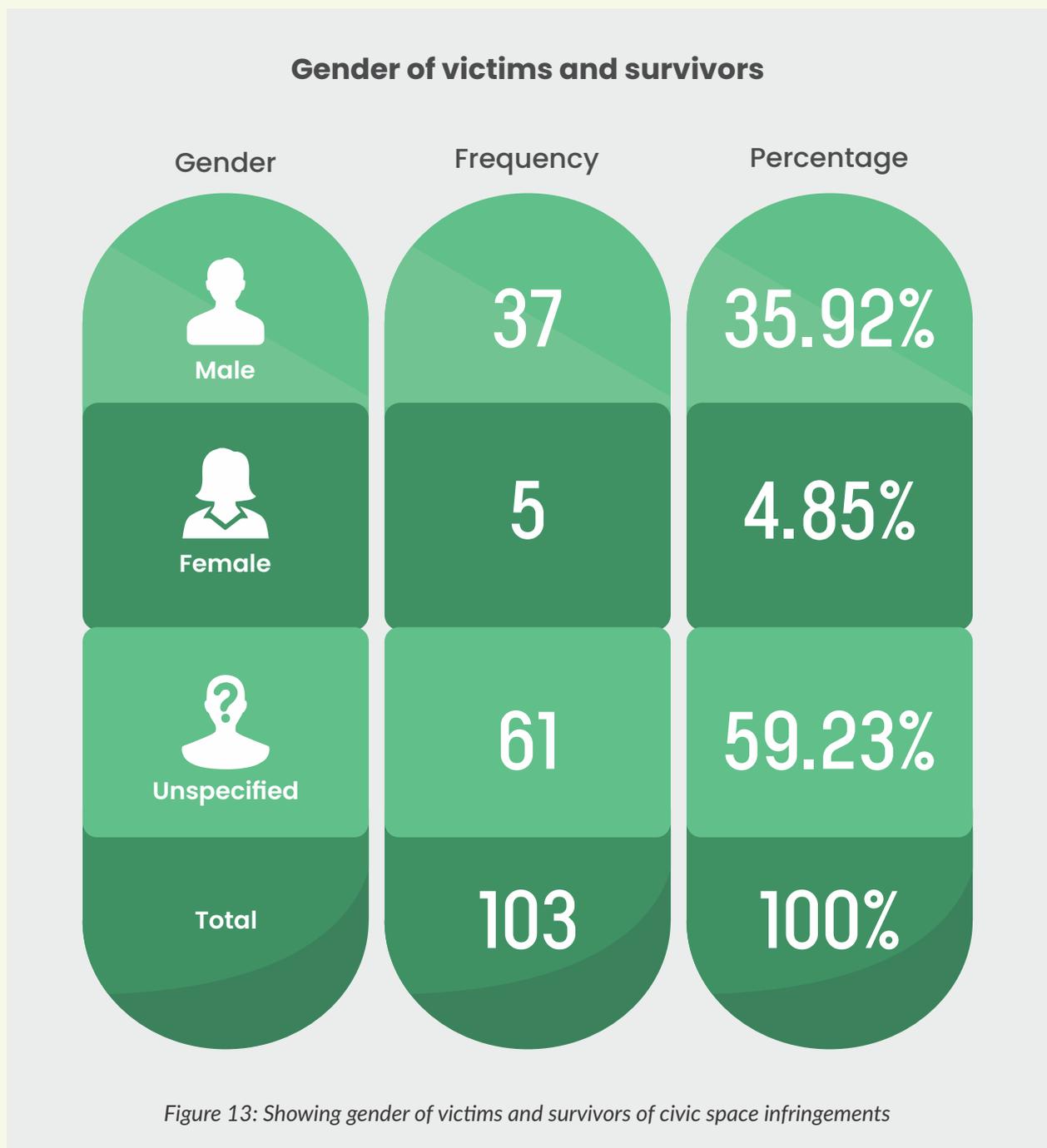


Media reports are gender blind!



Most reports are silent on victims and survivors of civic space infringements.

A gender-based analysis of civic space data breaches reveals a significant gap in documentation and reporting. Out of the 103 incidents, the gender of victims/survivors was unspecified in 61 instances, representing 59% of the total. This indicates a lack of detailed reporting on the identities of those affected, which limits a comprehensive understanding of how civic space restrictions impact women and men. Where gender was identified, men accounted for most victims/survivors as a total of 37 (36%) of the infringements involved males, while females were five (5), representing 5% of the infringements.



Scene of infringement

Data on the locations where civic space infringements occurred shows that protest grounds had the highest number of reported incidents, with 34 cases accounting for 33% of the total. These incidents took place during demonstrations or public gatherings and represent the most affected civic space in the country.





*Nigerian police shoots tear gas canisters to disperse protesters in Abuja during #EndBadGovernance protest
Photo Credit: Committee to Protect Journalists*

Law enforcement offices, including police stations and related facilities, recorded 17 cases, representing 16.5% of the total while polling units were identified in nine (9) cases, making up 8.7% of the total.

Instances of civic space infringements also occurred while journalists were covering events. This accounted for six (6) incidents, or 5.8%. While Court premises saw four (4) incidents, which accounted for 3.9%.

New media organisation premises and state houses recorded three (3) incidents each, contributing 2.9% respectively. These cases occurred within government institutions and media establishments, indicating that violations also extend into formal institutions and professional environments.

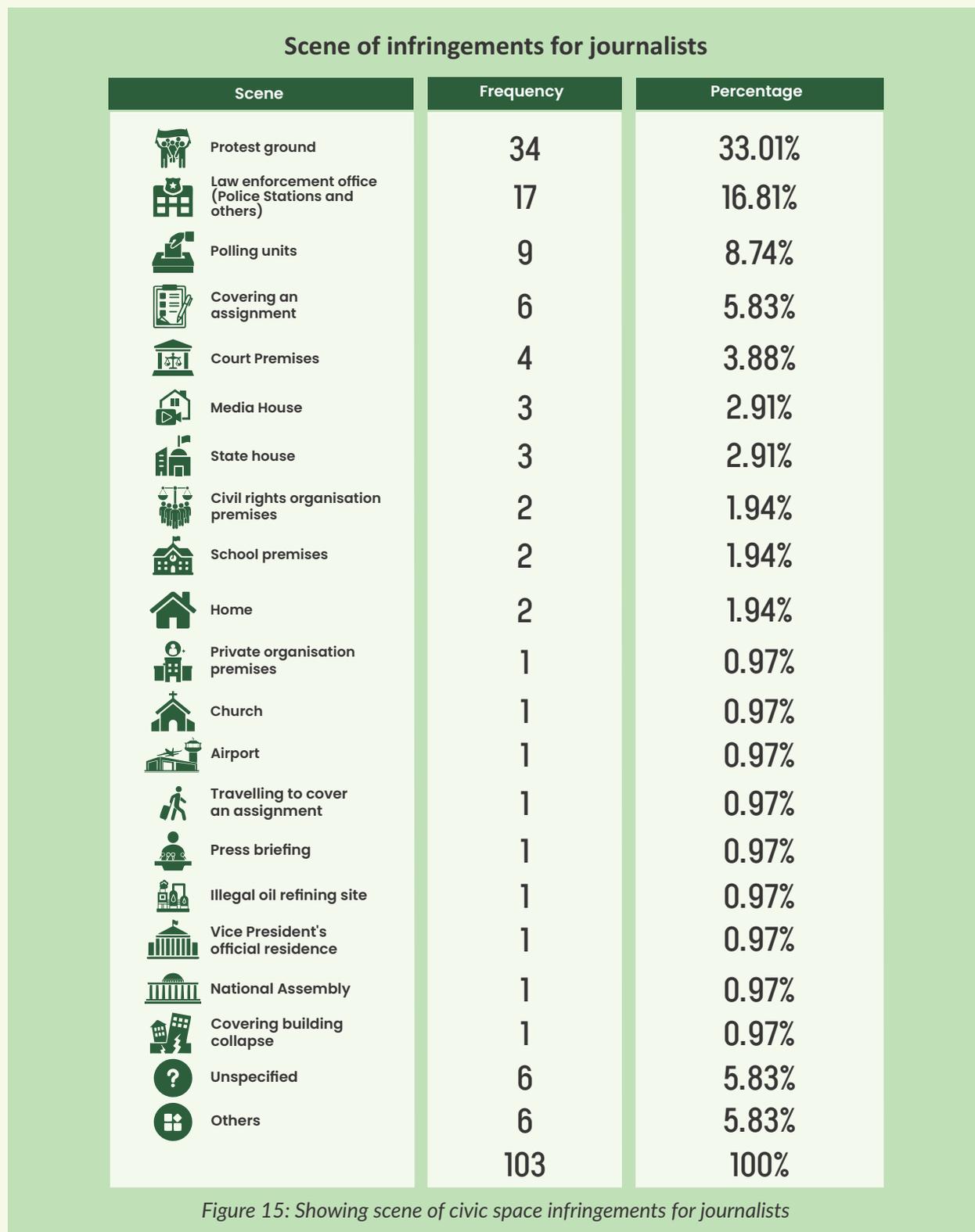
Civil rights organisation premises – International Press Centre (IPC) and Socio - Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP), school premises and homes each accounted for two (2) incidents, making up 1.9% each.

Some scenes recorded a single incident each, representing 1% of the total. These include private organisation premises, churches, airports, press briefings, travelling to cover an event, illegal oil refining sites, the Vice President’s official residence, the National Assembly and building collapse sites. Though individually lower in frequency, these scenes reflect the diverse environments where civic liberties restricted.

Finally, the categories labelled as “unspecified” and “others” also recorded six (6) incidents each, contributing 5.8%. This is yet another indicator of the vagueness of news reports on civic space infringements.

Scene of infringements for journalists

The breakdown of scenes of civic space infringements reveals troubling realities about the unsafe environments journalists often find themselves in while carrying out their duties in Nigeria. Out of the 44 cases of civic space infringements involving journalists, protest grounds recorded the highest number of such scenes, with 12 incidents representing 27.27% of all journalist-related violations. This reflects the continued volatility of protests, where journalists are often caught in the crossfire of state and non-state actors while attempting to report on public demonstrations.





“Stop running, just explain how your pen is mightier” a cartoon by Dada Adekola published in Vanguard Newspaper on 29 August 2024. It depicts a policeman chasing a journalist, satirising the repression of press freedom.

Six (6) of the incidents, making up 13.64% of the total, happened while journalists were covering an event, while law enforcement offices, including police stations and similar facilities, followed with five (5) reported incidents, representing 11.36%.

“

Some journalists were held hostage ... within the premises of the Federal High Court in Osogbo, Osun State. The hoodlums, who had thronged the court in large numbers, held some journalists covering the matter of hostage within the court's premises after the presiding judge adjourned the matter. The hoodlums, who identified some of the journalists while the court was in session, threatened to attack them after the proceedings. The affected journalists involved could not leave the premises for about 40 minutes after adjournment.

”

Polling units followed closely with four (4) incidents, amounting to 9.09%. Court premises and state houses each recorded three (3) cases, representing 6.82% respectively. An instance of journalists' rights being infringed upon in the court premises was reported by DailyPost on 20 March 2024. According to the report, “Some journalists were held hostage ... within the premises of the Federal High Court in Osogbo, Osun State. The hoodlums, who had thronged the court in large numbers, held some journalists covering the matter of hostage within the court's premises after the presiding judge adjourned the matter. The hoodlums, who identified some of the journalists while the court was in session, threatened to attack them after the proceedings. The affected journalists involved could not leave the premises for about 40 minutes after adjournment.”

Single incidents, each making up 2.27% of the total, occurred across a variety of scenes including media houses, homes, private organisation premises,

airports, and press briefings. Other less conventional yet significant scenes included travelling to cover an assignment, an illegal oil refining site, the Vice President's official residence, the National Assembly, and a building collapse. Also, the "Others" category also accounted for one (1) incident or 2.27%.

An instance of an incident happening on the premises of a private organisation was reported on 22 August 2024, by the Foundation for Investigative Journalism (FIJ). According to the report,

Abdulrasheed Hammad, a freelance journalist, working on an investigative story on the authenticity of the NAFDAC registration number was physically abused, dehumanised, held hostage for hours at a sachet water factory and later handed over to the police by the sachet water manufacturer.

A specific example of an infringement which happened at the airport was reported in a Premium Times story of 25 August 2024. According to Premium Times,

...the State Security Service has detained a Nigerian journalist, Adejuwon Soyinka, who is the West African Regional Editor of the Conversation Africa. Mr Soyinka, a former pioneer editor of the BBC Pidgin Service, was detained by SSS operatives at the Murtala Muhammed International Airport in Lagos at about 5.40 a.m. on Sunday upon his arrival from the United Kingdom via a Virgin Atlantic flight.

Also, investigative journalist, Fisayo Soyombo, was detained by operatives of the Nigerian Army's 6 Division in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, while working on a story at an illegal oil refining site, as reported by HumAngle on 29 November 2024. Similarly, journalists covering the unveiling of the Vice President's official residence were reportedly obstructed doing their duties, as highlighted by Within Nigeria on 8 June 2024. At the National Assembly, at least 10 television stations were denied access to the Senate gallery on the directive of the Senate President, Godswill Akpabio, as reported by DailyPost on 7 May 2024. These examples underline the expanding scope of threats to press freedom, showing that beyond volatile public events infringements also occur in structured institutional settings where the safety of citizens, journalists and activists alike should be guaranteed.

Trends analysis of civic space infringements (2012-2024)

Between 2012 and 2024, Nigeria experienced a notable transformation in the nature, frequency and visibility of civic space infringements. This period, spanning more than a decade, presents both long-term patterns and recent, sharp developments that show the evolving risks to civic actors and democratic freedoms.

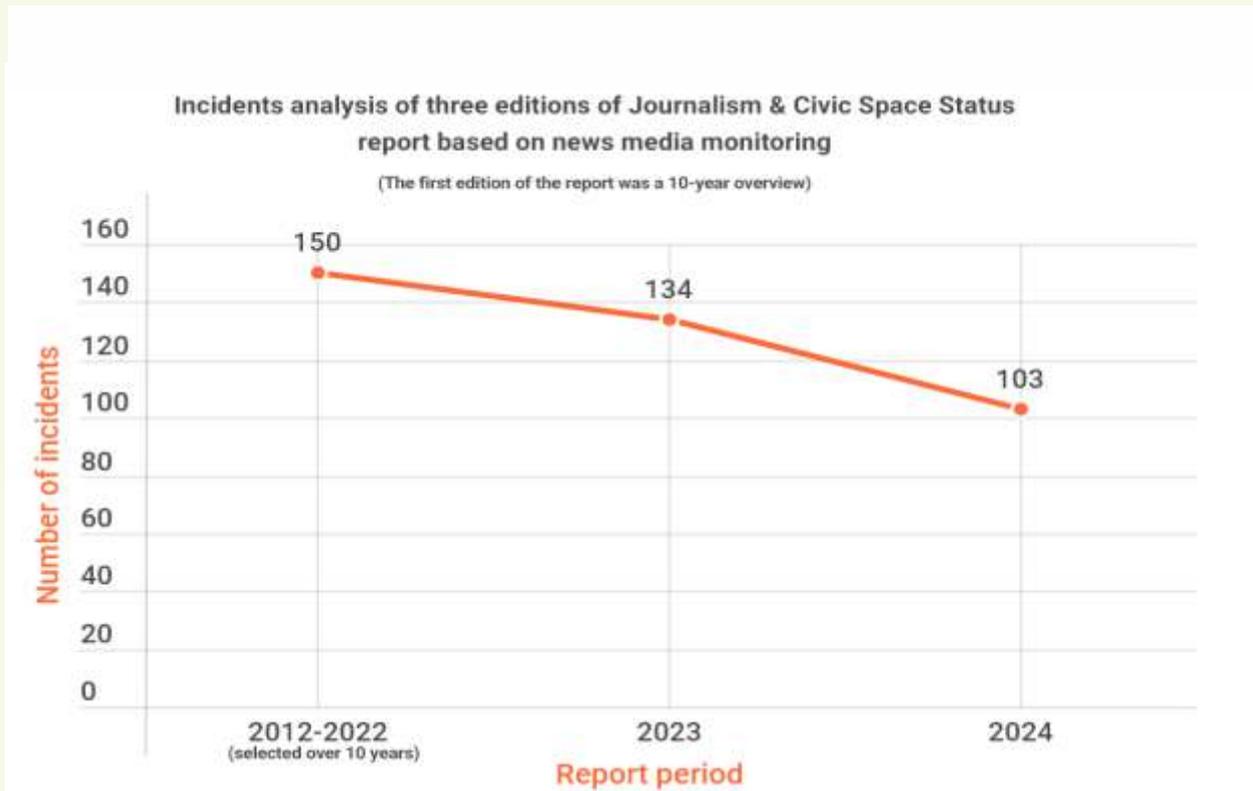


Figure 16: Showing incidents analysis of three editions of Journalism & Civic Space Status report (2012-2024)

Hushed voices and the media's defence of the civic space: A media monitoring report on infractions on civil rights in Nigeria

The first report, published in 2022, covers the period 2012 to 2022. This report analysed 150 incidents of civic space infringements. This represents an average of 15 incidents per year. While this figure provides a useful baseline, it is essential to note that it does not fully reflect the scope of violations during that period. One of the significant challenges with the data at the time was that Nigeria's news industry was just catching on the wave of online publication, documentation and archiving process. Many media organisations at the time were either new to publishing stories online or lacked proper digital infrastructure. Some reports were lost or deleted when they were moved to digital platforms. As such, the data from 2012 to 2022 should be regarded not as a complete record, but as a sample sufficient to observe general trends.

With WSCIJ now adopting a yearly reporting format, beginning with the 2023 Nigeria Journalism & Civic Space Status Report titled ‘Hushed Voices in an Election Year’, a dramatic shift became evident. In 2023 alone, 134 incidents were recorded, nearly matching the total from the entire previous decade. While the number dropped slightly to 103 in 2024, as captured in this current report, it still far exceeds the earlier average of 15 incidents per year recorded in the 2022 report that covered 10 years. This sustained increase points to ongoing escalation, whether in the actual frequency of violations, improved monitoring and reporting or a combination of both.

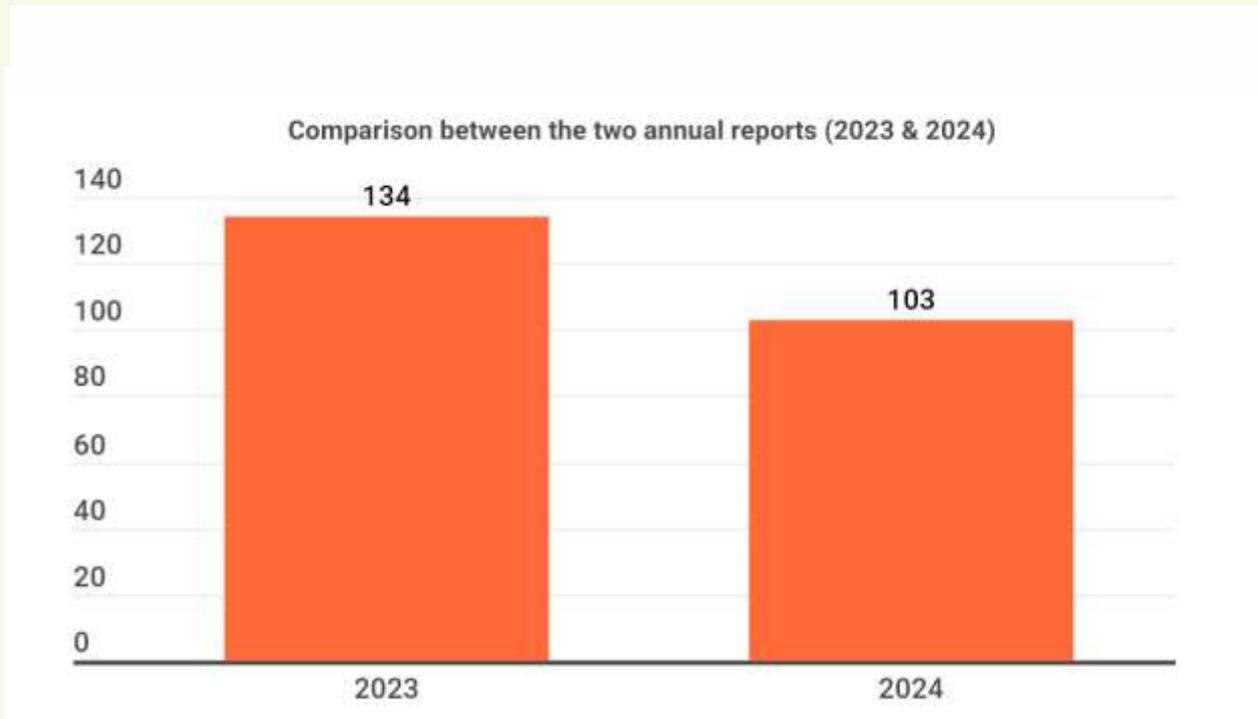
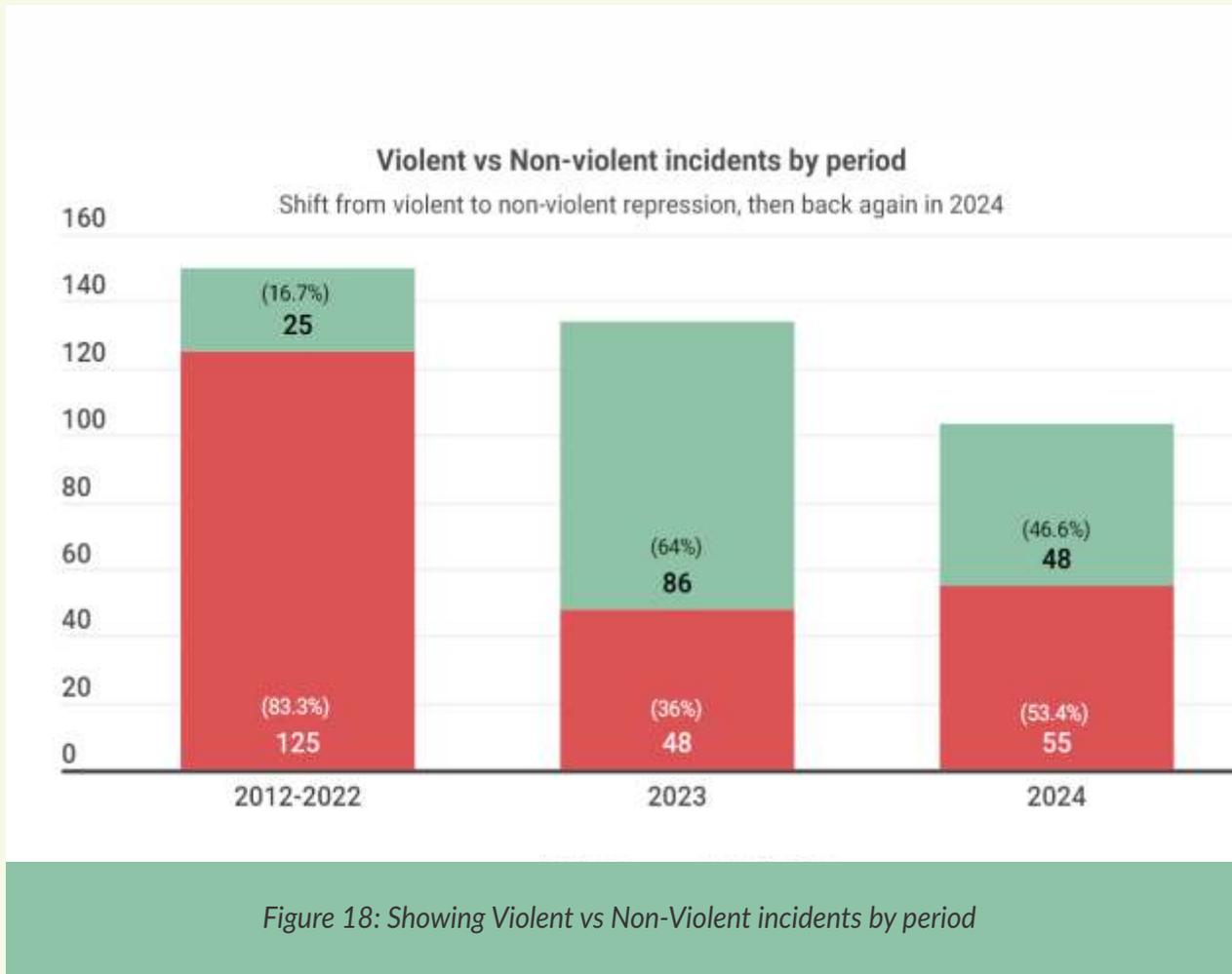


Figure 17: Showing comparison between the two annual reports (2023 & 2024)

From 19 incidents in 2020, the number of incidents rose to 45 in 2021 and then 27 in 2022. The intensified monitoring in 2023 and 2024 enabled a closer examination of how these violations were concentrated around key events. In 2023, most incidents occurred in February and March, coinciding with the general elections. In 2024, the pattern shifted again, with August seeing the highest activity, particularly during the #EndBadGovernance protests.

Throughout the period, state actors consistently served as primary perpetrators. The Nigerian Police were indicted in most cases, while the State Security Services (SSS) or Department of State Services (DSS) and Nigerian Army also emerged frequently in 2022 and 2024. Notably, politicians became prominent perpetrators of infringement in 2023. This spike is noteworthy because 2023 was an election year, and the presence of politicians was typically less significant in other years.

The nature of breaches also changed. Between 2012 and 2022, violent offences accounted for 83.3% of all incidents. In 2023, there was a sharp reversal, with non-violent offences accounting for 64 per cent. However, in 2024, the proportion of violent incidents rose again to 53.4%.



Geographically, the Federal Capital Territory and Lagos consistently recorded the highest numbers of incidents. Rivers and Osun were prominent in specific years, and Kano appeared in 2024. These trends point to a focus on urban centres where civil dissent is more visible and potentially influential and where media coverage is typically more robust.

The groups most affected by these infringements also changed over time. Journalists were the primary targets during the 2012–2022 period and again in 2024, highlighting the continued vulnerability of the press. Citizens, by contrast, were most affected in 2023. Media organisations and activists were affected throughout the years but were not as prominently targeted.

The forms of repression included arrests, detentions, and restrictions on performing duties. In 2023, obstruction from performing duties was more common, while 2024 saw a return to arrests and detentions.

Media coverage of these incidents has not evolved beyond basic reportage, offering minimal follow-up or investigative depth. Between 2012 and 2023, many reports consisted of news stories, with very few in-depth features or investigations. This trend continued in 2024, with only one feature report being recorded. The pattern highlights the need for increased investment in investigative reporting on civic space violations.

In summary, the data points to a worsening civic environment in Nigeria, with increased infringements, a rise in violent methods, and persistent targeting of journalists. The spikes around elections and protests highlight the political triggers of repression. Despite some fluctuations, the long-term trend shows civic space under sustained pressure, with signs of deteriorating conditions in recent years.

(Refer to Appendix D for a detailed table of incidents, actors, locations and types of infringements across the 2012–2024 period.)



Summary of findings

This section highlights the key insights drawn from the analysis of 103 documented civic space infringements across Nigeria in 2024. It captures patterns in the nature, scale and location of violations, profiles of affected groups, tactics used by perpetrators, and the quality of media coverage. The findings indicate that a civic environment remains under significant threat, one where press freedom is routinely undermined, citizens are silenced, and institutional safeguards are either weak or absent. The points below show the most critical trends and gaps observed.

A marginal decline, but little sign of relief

The number of documented civic space violations declined slightly, from 134 incidents in 2023 to 103 in 2024, but this offers little comfort. The nature and severity of violations remained deeply troubling. Rather than a sign of progress, the decline suggests a shift in strategy and methods, rather than a reduction in threats (it also points to the fact that in an election year and whenever there are protests, the number is likely to increase).

State actors are driving repression

The data confirms a longstanding pattern: state actors were responsible for nearly 79 per cent of recorded infringements. The Nigerian Police accounted for over 65 per cent, using physical force, arbitrary detention and legal harassment to silence dissent. The Department of State Services (DSS) and Nigerian Army also played key roles, with reports of journalists and protesters being assaulted and, in some incidents, fired upon. Non-state actors, including political thugs and unidentified assailants, contributed to the climate of fear, often acting with impunity or state complicity.

Violations evolved, but the message stayed the same

Violations were almost evenly split between violent and non-violent forms. Non-violent methods included legal intimidation, obstruction of journalistic work, and arbitrary arrests, often used to frustrate and exhaust civic actors. Violent acts, including beatings, shootings and abductions, sent a clear message about the costs of speaking out.

Media coverage present, but solidarity needs to grow

Urban centres such as Abuja, Lagos and Kano recorded the highest number of incidents, not only due to their political and civic importance, but also because they attract greater media presence and coverage, making violations in these areas more visible. This shows a broader pattern: visibility is tied to media access. Although many incidents were reported in the press, 99.7 per cent appeared as standard news stories, with only one feature recorded throughout the year. Many of the incidents were reported by only one or two platforms.

Urban repression zones

Violations were not evenly distributed. They were strategically concentrated in key urban and political centres, particularly: Federal Capital Territory (Abuja), Lagos, and Kano. These cities represent both the visibility of civic action and the strategic importance of silencing dissent in influential spaces.

Gender data remains a blind spot

Gender information was missing in 59 per cent of all recorded incidents, severely limiting the ability to track how women and marginalised groups are affected. Where gender was known, men accounted for many victims. Also, the classification of media actors posed further analytical challenges. In some reports, individuals were described as journalists; in others, they were labelled as bloggers, particularly when allegations of blackmail or unethical conduct were present.

A climate of fear, now normalised

The report reveals that Nigeria's civic space is under pressure. State and non-state actors use violence and surveillance to shrink the space for dissent, while media silence or superficial coverage allows these actions to continue unchecked.

The warning is clear

These findings issue a warning: without urgent reforms and accountability, Nigeria risks normalising authoritarian tactics. The right to speak, report, organise, and protest will continue to erode unless the civic space is actively defended.



Recommendations

The findings of this report point to an urgent need for institutional, legal, and professional interventions to reverse the ongoing decline of civic freedoms in Nigeria. Civic space struggles in an environment where intimidation is routine; media actors are criminalised, and accountability mechanisms are weak or absent.

To protect the right to free expression, strengthen press freedom and ensure safer conditions for civic engagement; this report outlines a series of targeted recommendations. These proposals are drawn from observed trends in the 2024 data and recurring patterns.

The judiciary must lead the reforms

A critical part of the required reforms involves addressing the legal instruments that enable or fail to prevent infringements. Several existing laws contain ambiguous language, loopholes, or overbroad interpretations that allow state actors to justify the censorship, arrest, or harassment of citizens and journalists. These legal gaps must be closed through precise amendments and stronger safeguards.

The table below summarises key provisions in media-related laws, identifies the problematic sections and proposes clear amendments to better align Nigeria's legal framework with democratic norms and international best practices. Full details are in Appendix C.

Table 3: Provisions in media laws, their loopholes, and suggested amendments

S/N	Law	Provision	Loopholes	Suggested amendments
1	Printing Presses Regulation Act (1933)	Requires registration of printing presses and identification of publishers.	Outdated and inapplicable to digital media.	Modernise to reflect digital publishing; adopt proportionate regulatory measures.
2	Criminal Code (Sections 373–381)	Defines defamation as statements likely to damage a person's reputation. Imposes criminal penalties, including imprisonment.	Vague terminology; used to silence journalists and public criticism; incompatible with democratic norms.	Repeal criminal defamation provisions; introduce civil remedies that respect free expression.
3	Criminal Code (Section 58, 1958)	Allows the minister to ban publications considered to be against the public interest.	No clear definition of public interest; enables subjective bans without oversight.	Require judicial authorisation or any ban; limit executive discretion.
4	Criminal Code (Section 59(1))	Criminalises the publication of false information likely to cause fear or disturb public peace.	Broad and undefined terms; open to arbitrary enforcement.	Clarify terms; require proof of both intent and action for prosecution.
5	Criminal Code (Section 88A)	Prohibits offensive publications likely to provoke a breach of the peace.	The term 'offensive' is subjective and undefined; it overlaps with other offences.	Define 'offensive' clearly; streamline related provisions to prevent redundancy.
6	Children and Young Persons Act (1961)	Seeks to prevent minors' exposure to harmful publications, particularly those featuring graphic or picture-based content.	Vague terms in the law, such as 'immoral behaviour', risk censoring artistic or journalistic content.	Provide clear definitions to distinguish between children's media and general publications.
7	Official Secrets Act (1962)	Criminalises unauthorised handling of classified information, broadly defined.	Excessive discretion; no provision for public interest defence.	Limit scope of classified information; introduce oversight and public interest exceptions.
8	Freedom of Information Act (2011)	Grants public access to official records while maintaining the confidentiality of sources.	Weak enforcement and a lack of domestication by many states.	Ensure compliance nationwide; apply penalties for non-compliance.
9	Terrorism Prevention Acts (2011 & 2013)	Outlaws dissemination of content promoting terrorism, including by the media.	Broad definitions threaten legitimate journalism and public interest reporting.	Narrow definitions; include explicit protections for journalistic activity.
10	Cybercrime Act (2015, Section 24)	Criminalises sending grossly offensive, false, or distressing online messages.	Ambiguous and subjective language; risks misuse against legitimate expression.	Clarify definitions; exclude emotional or subjective standards; protect free speech.

Figure 19: Showing a breakdown of the provisions in media laws, their loopholes, and suggested amendments

In addition to legal reforms, there is a pressing need for multisectoral action to safeguard Nigeria's civic space. The violations documented in this report reflect systemic weaknesses across enforcement, media accountability, public awareness and institutional transparency. As such, the following recommendations are directed at key stakeholders, including government agencies, media organisations, civil society, professional bodies and international development partners whose collective efforts are essential to reversing the decline in civic freedoms. These measures prioritise journalist safety, media professionalism, public education, and stronger institutional responses to infringement.

For journalists, media organisations and professional bodies:



Prioritise comprehensive safety training, including digital security and psychological first aid, particularly for those covering high-risk events like conflicts, protests and elections.



Work in groups when covering sensitive assignments to enhance safety, as operating in teams provides immediate physical support and serves as a deterrent against potential threats.



Intensify advocacy for press freedom through professional bodies like the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) and the Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE); provide robust legal aid and community support for journalists facing threats, arrests, detentions, or legal persecution, drawing lessons from past challenges.



Ensure solidarity in coverage of civic space infringements to keep the issue of civil rights, freedom of expression and freedom of the press on the front burner.



Adopt more comprehensive reporting practices to ensure the consistent documentation of civic space infringements, including victim demographics and detailed accounts of incidents, to facilitate better analysis and accountability.



Invest more in investigative journalism and in-depth feature analyses to move beyond mere news reporting, thereby shedding more light on the systemic issues contributing to civic space infringements.



Provide comprehensive insurance for journalists to boost confidence and mitigate risks in the event of mishaps.

The Legislature



Initiate a comprehensive review and amendment process for laws such as the Cybercrime Act (Section 24), the Criminal Code (Sections 59(1), 58, 88A, 373- 381), the Terrorism Prevention Act, and the Official Secrets Act.



Focus amendments on clarifying vague language, removing subjective standards, explicitly protecting journalistic activity and public interest defence, and aligning relevant laws with constitutional guarantees of free expression and international standards, while addressing the persistent issues highlighted in 2023 and 2024.



Update outdated laws, such as the Printing Presses Regulation Act (1933), and others stated earlier, to reflect the realities of digital media and ensure proportionate regulatory measures that do not hinder contemporary publishing practices.

Security and law enforcement agencies



Establish precise mechanisms for investigating and prosecuting security personnel implicated in civic space infringements and ensure that disciplinary action is taken against those found culpable.



Train security operatives to recognise and respect press identification and ensure journalists can perform their duties without being deliberately targeted or having their equipment destroyed.



Recognise reporters as partners and co-guardians of the civic space and democracy.



Provide intentional mechanisms for protecting journalists during events and at scenes of civic engagement

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)



Sustain and expand efforts to monitor, document and report civic space infringements across all states using a live dashboard, including detailed disaggregated data with detailed demographic indicators, to build on the foundation of reports on the status of journalism and civic space, and engagements to keep it robust.



Collaborate with legal professionals to provide pro-bono legal services to victims of civic space infringements and advocate for legal reforms that protect fundamental rights.



Establish and strengthen support networks for victims and survivors of Infringements on civic space, offering both legal and psychological assistance.



Support the media to build the capacity of journalists and news media

Executive arm of government



Demonstrate clear political responsibility to uphold constitutional guarantees of press freedom and civic space, moving beyond rhetoric to concrete actions that protect these rights and reverse the concerning patterns of recent years.



Ensure prompt, impartial and transparent investigations into all reported incidents of civic space infringements, with a commitment to bring perpetrators to justice, irrespective of their affiliation.



Improve coordination among government bodies to ensure a unified approach to protecting civic space, rather than fragmented or contradictory actions that undermine fundamental rights.

Generally, the relationship between citizens, journalists and activities, and security agencies in Nigeria has been marked by tension, mistrust and frequent confrontation. This adversarial dynamic undermines freedom of expression and the role of the press and escalates the risk of civic space violations, particularly during protests, political events, and public gatherings.

To shift this narrative, there is a need to foster mutual respect and accountability between both parties. This involves creating platforms for regular dialogue, establishing clear protocols for engagement and organising joint capacity-building sessions that help both sides understand their rights, duties and limits. Journalists should be equipped with tools to engage lawfully and safely. At the same time, security operatives must be trained to view the press not as adversaries, but as critical partners in upholding democracy and transparency.



Conclusion

The findings from the 2024 Journalism and Civic Space Status media monitoring report - 'Shrinking Freedoms', point to a troubling erosion of civil liberties and journalistic independence in Nigeria. While the total number of documented civic space infringements declined slightly from the previous year, the resurgence of violent attacks indicates that state and non-state actors alike have grown more brazen in their attempts to silence dissent and restrict press activities.

The Nigerian Police remain the principal perpetrators of these infringements. They often deploy physical force, arbitrary arrests and harassment against journalists and citizens. Other security agencies, including the SSS and the Nigerian Army, are also implicated in unlawful detentions, threats and acts of intimidation. In many cases, these actions occurred in full view of the public and with little or no subsequent accountability.

Equally alarming is the continued misuse of legislation, particularly the Cybercrime Act and outdated provisions in the Criminal Code, to stifle critical reporting. These laws, couched in vague and subjective language, are routinely applied to prosecute journalists, detain social critics and legitimise censorship under the guise of maintaining order or protecting reputations. Despite calls for reform, the legal environment remains hostile to those seeking to expose corruption, demand accountability, or advocate for social change.

The targeting of journalists, most of whom were assaulted or arrested while clearly identifiable as members of the press, illustrates a deliberate strategy to suppress public scrutiny. Research shows these violations are systematic. Also, protests continue to be met with unnecessary and excessive force. The #EndBadGovernance protests of August 2024 saw a spike in attacks, arrests and surveillance directed at both journalists and civil society actors. Protest grounds continue to remain in high-risk spaces, where the constitutional right to peaceful assembly is frequently violated with teargas, bullets and arbitrary detention.

Despite the growing dangers, journalists, media organisations and civil society actors have shown resilience and determination. However, resilience alone cannot safeguard civic space. Without meaningful institutional reform, legal safeguards and a culture of accountability, Nigeria risks entrenching a climate of fear where silence replaces scrutiny and self-censorship becomes the norm.

Considering the evidence presented, urgent action is required. The continued undermining of press freedom and civic participation weakens democratic governance. If left unaddressed, these trends will further erode public trust, stifle political debate, and hamper the country's ability to respond to social and economic challenges. It is the responsibility of all stakeholders, including the government, media, security agencies, the legislature, and civil society, to reverse this trajectory and reaffirm their commitment to protecting the rights of all citizens to speak, report, protest, and participate freely in public life.



Some journalists targeted in line of duty #JournalismIsNotACrime

Journalists across Nigeria faced arrests, harassment, attacks, legal intimidation, and other violations. Below are some cases:



Azeez Adisa-Jaji

Informant247

Charged with cybercrime and defamation after reporting on a fraud investigation on Monday 5 February.



Salihu Ayatullahi

Informant247

Charged with cybercrime and defamation after publishing an investigative report to expose corruption at Kwara State Polytechnic on Monday 5 February.



Kasarachi Aniagolu

The Whistler Newspaper

Unlawfully detained by the Anti-Violence Crime Unit of the Nigerian Police Force on Thursday 22 February while covering a police raid on Bureau de Change operators. Assaulted, threatened, and had her journalistic equipment confiscated. Detained alongside 95 forex traders.



Daniel Ojukwu

Foundation for Investigative Journalism (FIJ)

On Wednesday 1 May, he was arrested and detained for nine days based on a petition accusing him of violating the Cybercrimes Act for a story he authored.



Idibia Gabriel

Freelance Journalist, Kaduna

Brutalised by Nigerian police officers on Tuesday 11 June for taking pictures of them transporting seized cattle. Suffered eye injuries as a result of the alleged torture



Jide Oyekunle

Daily Independent Newspapers

Taken away by a police officer for covering the #EndBadGovernance protest in Abuja on Thursday 1 August.



Olukayode Jayiode

The Punch Newspaper

Attacked by police officers while covering the #EndBadGovernance protest on Friday 2 August in Abuja. His camera, phones, and other personal belongings were seized by the police.



Abdulrasheed Hammad

Freelance Journalist

On Thursday 15 August, received a phone call from a Department of State Services (DSS) official in Sokoto State, who stated the invitation was connected to an investigative story published by TheCable.



Adejuwon Soyinka

The Conversation Africa

Detained and interrogated for about 8 hours by the State Security Service (SSS) upon arrival at Murtala Muhammed International Airport in Lagos on 25 August. The SSS' first explanation for the arrest was that his name was placed on its watchlist on the request of an unnamed government agency. It later blamed the entire saga on a possible mistaken identity.



Fisayo Soyombo

Foundation for Investigative Journalism (FIJ)

Detained and held incommunicado for three days by the 6th Amphibious Division of the Nigerian Army in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, on Thursday 28 November.



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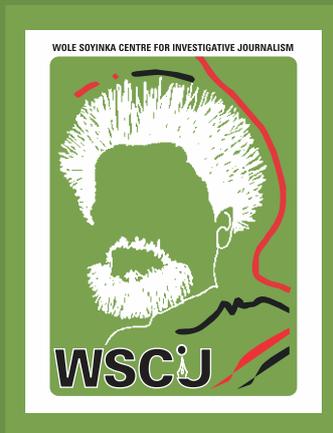
Appendix

Frequency of coverage of civic space infringements

S/N	Incidents	Frequency of reportage
1.	Police storm Radio/TV station, arrest guest during live programme in Umuahia	6
2.	Journalists assaulted during Edo Primaries	2
3.	Global upfront editor arrested over 'defamatory' publication	4
4.	Police fire tear gas at Abuja protesters	6
5.	Hoodlums chase protesters from Lagos park	6
6.	Soldier shoots 16-year-old protester dead in Kaduna	8
7.	Thugs harass journalist, beat up protesters in Rivers	1
8.	Gunmen abduct two journalists and family members in Kaduna	5
9.	Nigerian police arrest FIJ reporter Daniel Ojukwu	6
10.	Police kill/injure protesters in Niger State	2
11.	Police arrest anonymous whistleblower PIDOMNigeria	7
12.	Journalist imprisoned for sharing content critical of Kano governor	2
13.	Police arrest activist Akande Daniel in church	1
14.	Police fire tear gas into the hospital during anti-fuel protests	1
15.	DSS raid SERAP office in Abuja	4
16.	Police attack AIT correspondent and protesters in Abuja	1
17.	Protesters allege live bullet use in Abuja, police deny	1
18.	FG arraigns EndBadGovernance protesters	7
19.	NUJ, Kwara NUJ condemn journalist arrests	6
20.	Police teargas protesters in Abuja (Oct 1)	1
21.	Police/thugs disrupt protest in Rivers	4
22.	Police disrupt LG poll in Port Harcourt	4
23.	3 killed, 1 missing in journalist kidnap in Anambra	4
24.	Journalists attacked during Bayelsa APC crisis	2
25.	EFCC invades Enugu radio, arrests presenter	8
26.	Kidnappers abduct Ogun journalist	1
27.	DSS arrests journalist over report on Akpabio	2
28.	Over 18 arrested at EndSARS anniversary protest	5
29.	Imo police arrested a broadcast journalist over inciting statement	6
30.	Kano bans journalists from covering govt activities	2
31.	Police detain Facebook friend to trace activist	1
32.	Youth activists detained over participation in a peaceful demonstration	1
33.	Taraba senator orders detention over criticism	1
34.	Gunshots in Idanre during OndoDecides2024	1
35.	DSS arrests protester over anti-NNPC protest	1

36.	Police arrest ex-commissioner over criticism	2
37.	Fisayo Soyombo detained by the Nigerian Army	9
38.	DSS arrests Take-It-Back organiser in Kano	1
39.	Police arrest Dele Farotimi, a human rights lawyer	10
40.	Journalists barred from Zamfara budget presentation	3
41.	Activist arrested over social media insults	2
42.	TikToker arrested over insults against Tinubu, Sanwo-Olu	1
43.	Channels TV crew harassed at UniAbuja protest	4
44.	Protesters arrested in Kano over emirship tussle	5
45.	UI students queried about protesting the fee hike	4
46.	Police warn against June 12 protest in Anambra	5
47.	IPC alleges police surveillance	3
48.	June 12 protesters arrested in Lagos, Ibadan	3
49.	Juwon was arrested in Lagos over the June 12 protest	3
50.	Journalists were attacked in the Ebonyi court during a kingship protest	3
51.	Protesters dispersed by police in Delta	1
52.	Journalist attacked in Kano protest	2
53.	Police teargas women at Supreme Court protest	1
54.	Gunshots at Rivers LG secretariat during protest	3
55.	Thugs hijack ballot boxes in Ondo bye-election	2
56.	Journalists barred during SGF-labour meeting in Abuja	3
57.	Journalists barred from VP Shettima's residence tour	2
58.	Hoodlums attack anti-Ganduje protesters at APC HQ	5
59.	Female reporter harassed covering IDP camp protest in Borno	1
60.	Police shoot woman, injure protesters in Delta	2
61.	Journalists expelled from Abia Assembly	2
62.	Police teargas students protesting robbery/rape in Bauchi	3
63.	Senate bars TV/photojournalists	2
64.	Journalist attacked during Oyo LG election	1
65.	Journalist arrested at hardship protest in Delta	3
66.	Editor tortured by soldiers in Abuja	3
67.	Journalists barred from LP convention	3
68.	Journalists injured during NUJ palliative protest in Cross River	3
69.	Thugs threaten Lagosians not to join the protest	5
70.	TikToker jailed for hunger protest in Kano	2
71.	Police teargas FCE students	1
72.	DSS/police arrest student and activist over online posts	1
73.	Police block university workers' protest in Abuja	4
74.	Police ban Shi'ite procession in Abuja	4
75.	One dead in food company protest in Ibadan	7
76.	Journalists held hostage in the Osun court	2
77.	Soldiers bar journalists during the Delta governor's visit	4
78.	Protesters/journalists attacked in Delta	3

79.	ICIR journalists detained by police	5
80.	DSS harasses journalist in Sokoto over water report	5
81.	The Whistler journalist arrested during the EFCC raid	4
82.	DSS detains Adejuwon Soyinka	11
83.	4 journalists charged with cybercrime over GTB report	2
84.	Journalist brutalised for photographing cattle	5
85.	Journalist covering protest harassed in Abuja	4
86.	Journalists arrested on Democracy Day protests	3
87.	Governor's aides brutalise journalists	2
88.	Suspects assault journalists in court	2
89.	Police teargas protesters in Imo	1
90.	Immigration officers assault journalists in Ibadan and Edo	4
91.	Ondo commissioner assaults NAN editor	5
92.	LASBCA boss assaults journalist at collapse site	4
93.	Protesters dispersed with teargas during a protest rally	1
94.	Bank guards assault a journalist in Abia	4
95.	Rivers LG election: Journalists attacked, gadgets destroyed	1
96.	Hisbah detains journalist for interview request	4
97.	Journalist threatened after land tussle story	1
98.	Journalist detained over Lagos businessman report	4
99.	Journalist spends 3 months in prison for cybercrime	1
100.	Journalists re-arraigned for cyberstalking GTCO	4
101.	Bauchi governor's aides threaten journalists	5
102.	Journalists barred from EFCC arraignment of ex-Kwara gov	3
103.	Robbers invade Oyo radio station	4
104.	Total	342



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