

# Investigative Journalism and Risk Management Frameworks: Strategies for Protecting Journalists in High-Risk Environments of the Niger Delta

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## Abstract

*This paper sets out to explore the critical intersection of investigative journalism and risk management, with a keen focus on practical strategies for protecting journalists operating in such hostile environments as the Niger Delta. Specifically, it aims to: Examine the multifaceted risks of physical, digital, legal, and psychological confronting investigative journalists in high-risk zones, particularly within the Niger Delta; and identify and analyse both individual coping mechanisms and institutional support frameworks designed to mitigate these dangers in the context of the region's specific threats. This paper employs a comprehensive review of recent academic literature, empirical studies, and real-world case studies predominantly focused on investigative journalism in high-risk zones, with a particular emphasis on the African context, including the Niger Delta. This approach allows for the identification of recurring patterns of threats, effective mitigation strategies, and emerging best practices in journalist protection, while also considering the unique digital media ecosystem challenges faced by journalists in the region. The findings highlight that journalists in the Niger Delta and similar high-risk areas grapple with pervasive threats ranging from physical violence, arbitrary detention, and kidnapping to sophisticated digital surveillance and severe psychological stress. These threats are often exacerbated by the region's specific challenges, including militancy, oil theft, and the activities of powerful economic and political actors. Effective protection strategies are found to be multifaceted, encompassing individual preparedness (e.g., advanced safety training, encrypted communication, meticulous source protection) and robust institutional support (e.g., strong press unions, clear organisational safety protocols, international solidarity, and legal aid). Investigative journalism remains an indispensable force for exposing societal flaws, corruption, and human rights abuses, especially within the challenging landscapes of regions like the Niger Delta. However, this vital work is undertaken at immense personal peril. This study concludes that proactive, comprehensive, and adaptable risk management frameworks are not merely beneficial but absolutely essential for sustaining independent journalism in environments where the truth is often suppressed by force.*

## Keywords

Investigative Journalism, Risk Management, Journalist Protection, High-Risk Environments, Niger Delta, Media Safety, Press Freedom



## I. Introduction

It is on record that investigative journalism plays a vital role in checkmating and holding government accountable to the people. However, it is established in the literature that in the process of carrying out this investigative task, journalists are exposed to so many risks like psychological harm, physical abuse, death, kidnapping, and harassment among others. In the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, these risks are amplified by a volatile mix of resource-driven conflicts, widespread environmental degradation, organised crime, corruption, and

political instability (Onyejelem, 2025b). Journalists operating here often find themselves caught between powerful state and non-state actors, including oil companies, militant groups, and corrupt politicians, making their work inherently dangerous.

Pate and Idris (2017) established in their study that Nigerian journalists have relied and still rely on the strength of their union and other national and international civil society organisations that guarantee their rights, and on the basis of need, react against impunity directed at them. A study by Fournier (2014) observed that the future of the safety of journalists in armed conflict should be a continuation in the present focus of the combination of raising awareness for less impunity and practical assistance (Aondover et al., 2024). This is because, according to Yusuf (2013) those who are made journalists object of target, harassment is never brought to book. Therefore, this study seeks to examine investigative journalism and risk management strategies among journalists, with a specific focus on the Niger Delta region.

Nigeria is a signatory to many international treaties on human rights. The country became African Charter on Human and People's Rights in 1983, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 1993 and an associate in the Convention Against Torture in 2001. Nigeria is also bound, as a state party of the United Nations, by Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that guarantees freedom of expression (PEN International 2013).

Section 39 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria guarantees freedom of expression. But according to The Nation newspaper (May 3, 2013), 'Nigeria today, joined the list of countries where journalists are killed and assaulted with little or no effort to bring culprits to book.' While this statement was made concerning broader Nigerian contexts, the Niger Delta has historically been a hotbed for such violations. Following the activities of Boko Haram in the North East and politically inspired violence in Maiduguri, at least five journalists have been killed in the course of their professional role since 2009. None of these has been solved as many more are being attacked by the day', the paper reported. In the Niger Delta, journalists face similar, if not intensified, dangers when reporting on oil theft, environmental pollution, and the resultant community unrest. The intricate web of criminal networks and political patronage makes investigative reporting particularly hazardous (Onyejelem, 2025b).

This is so as security forces, public officials and militants continue to infringe upon the freedom of expression which the constitution guarantees. In 2012, Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) recorded 143 cases of press freedom violations in Nigeria, including obstructions, assaults, threats, arbitrary detentions, seizures of recordings as well as gadgets, and murder. The report noted that security forces including soldiers, police and the State Security Service (SSS) were responsible for 79% of the press freedom violations as reported in (PEN International, 2013). These patterns are distinctly observable in the Niger Delta, where state security forces are often deployed in response to militancy and civil unrest, sometimes leading to confrontations with journalists seeking to document events.

Thus, This Day newspaper's offices in Abuja and Kaduna were bombed at the same time in April 2012 when Boko Haram members struck after series of threats. The attack in Kaduna damaged the offices of Moment and The Sun newspapers. Again, on December 9, 2012 in an attempt to cover the birthday celebration of the governor of Akwa Ibom State. Abubakar Sadiq Isah, a Daily Trust reporter was reportedly battered on 10 November 2012 around Kwali Town Hall while covering a public hearing. Even though the police intervened,

the perpetrators were never arrested nor prosecuted. More so, a reporter with The Nation newspaper, Kazeem Ibrahim was attacked by the governor's security on 24 December. 2012, Musa Muhammad Auwal and Aliyu Saleh of the Weekly Al-Mizan in Kaduna were arrested following a report they published alleging the disappearance of some suspected militants in the custody of Joint Task Force (ibid). These incidents underscore a nationwide vulnerability that is particularly pronounced in regions with heightened conflict, such as the Niger Delta.

Although, as observed by The Nation newspaper, some of the assaults are orchestrated by Boko Haram as Enench Akogwu who was a reporter with Channel Television, was shot and killed by Boko Haram while interviewing witnesses after a terror attack in Kano State. According to Pate (2017) between 2009 and 2015, Nigeria lost four journalists to Boko Haram insurgency while performing their constitutional mandate. In October 2011, Zakarriya Isa who was a cameraman with NTA Borno State was shot and killed for working against the interest of the sect. Also, the Information Officer, Bama Local Government Area, Fara Malah Modu was killed during an exchange of fire between the army and fleeing Boko Haram members. Therefore, considering these attacks on journalists in Nigeria, this study seeks to examine investigative journalism and risk management strategies among journalists, giving particular attention to the unique security landscape of the Niger Delta.

## **II. Review of Literatures**

### **2.1 Conceptualising Professionalism and Risk Management among Journalists**

Journalists require autonomy, independence, flexibility and credibility to investigate issues that may be dangerous to their safety. As 'watchdogs', their actions may offend groups or individuals, with repercussions for their personal and institutional safety. Their levels of vulnerability may be higher in situations of violent conflicts and terrorism. This is particularly true in the Niger Delta, where journalistic inquiries into oil theft, corruption within the extractive industry, or politically motivated violence can directly threaten the safety of reporters and their sources (Onyejelem, 2025b). However, irrespective of the circumstances, journalists have to fulfil their professional mandate of informing and educating the society through reporting (Pate & Idris, 2017; Aondover et al., 2024).

Increasing evidence exists on threats and assaults as well as survival techniques among journalists globally. The President of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), Jim Boumelha (2016) lamented that, the world is becoming more dangerous for journalists. Around 2700 journalists were killed in the past 25 years; an average of two journalists per week. Ten countries have been listed at the top as regards censoring the media and media professionals in 2015. These are: Eritrea, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, Azerbaijan, Vietnam, Iran, China, Myanmar and Cuba. Imprisonment, repressive laws and restrictions of access to the Internet remain the most prevalent forms of intimidation and harassment against journalists (CPJ, 2015). In 2015 alone, about 105 journalists were killed on duty worldwide, while many more were threatened, imprisoned or kidnapped as reprisals for their work (RWB and UNESCO 2015). The deaths occurred across countries.

For instance, five journalists were killed each in Iraq, Brazil, Bangladesh, South Sudan, and Yemen. From the 105 killed in 2015, 40 per cent were killed by Al-Qaeda, Al-Shabab and Islamic State. More than two-thirds of the total was singled out for murder (Beiser, 2015). Similarly, the 2012 global statistics on murdered journalists showed that 63 per cent and 50 per cent of those killed covered politics and war, respectively (CPJ, 2013). Evidently, violence against journalists and repression of freedom of expression as a form of human right violation are widespread and occur globally, particularly considering that about

2,432 journalists were jailed during the past 15 years, of which 199 were jailed in 2015 across the world. The Niger Delta, with its complex political economy, environmental degradation, and resource control issues, contributes significantly to these global figures of journalist endangerment, especially as local journalists attempt to report on sensitive activities (Onyejelem, 2025b).

## 2.2 The Concept of Safety of Journalists

Safety of journalists is a trending concept that is getting wider acceptance among academics, practitioners and human rights organisations worldwide. Kenya Media Working Groups (2014) defines safety as “freedom from risk or harm as a result of unintentional acts such as accidents, natural phenomena and illness”. The UN Plan defines journalist’s safety as:

A broad category that extends from preventive, protective and pre-emptive measures, through combating impunity and promoting a social culture which cherishes freedom of expression and press freedom. Safety spans both online and offline worlds, and ... solutions require informed action at global, national and local levels whilst at the same time responding to contextual specificities in each castigate (p. 14).

This definition is particularly relevant for the Niger Delta, where threats can range from physical attacks in remote communities to sophisticated online surveillance.

The leading international organisations that support and promote the issue of journalists’ safety according to Jennifer et al (2015) are International Press Freedom Organisations and UN bodies like UNESCO, the Human Rights Council, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the UN General Assembly and the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression. International News Safety Institute - INSI, Committee to Protection of Journalists - CPJ, Reporters Without Borders - RSF, International Freedom of Expression Exchange - IFEX, Inter-American Press Association - IAPA, and so on.

Why is there so much concern on journalists’ safety? The answer is if journalists are not safe, they would not perform their function well, hence, people would not know what they ought to know about the happening in the corridor of power and other private institutions. The consequence is that citizens will not make meaningful participation in governance and public discourse (Braimah, 2014; Aondover et al., 2025). United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression has stated, an attack on a journalist is “an attack against the principles of transparency and accountability, as well as the right to hold opinions and to participate in public debates, which are essential for democracy” in essence, violence against a journalist is not only an attack on one particular victim, but on all members of the society (IACHR, 2013, p. 2). UNESCO (2013) observes three major reasons which necessitate care on the safety of journalists:

1. Unless journalists are safe and secure, they cannot be expected to carry out their professional duties that enable the media to provide the public platform for the exchange of ideas, opinions and information.
2. Unpunished killings and violence lead to self-censorship – journalists come to believe that it is simply too dangerous to cover certain topics.
3. The high vulnerability of journalists to threats means that members of society at large do not feel that they themselves are safe to speak when they see a journalist is attacked, and especially when there is impunity for the attackers.



According to UNESCO (2013) after long international, regional and national conferences, workshops, seminars, the following shared understandings and activities are developed to promote journalists' safety worldwide:

1. Amongst national stakeholder groups, there is an accurate understanding of the extent and nature of the problems.
2. Stakeholders are connected to national and international alert mechanisms.
3. Good practices are widely shared through online and offline stakeholder group networks.
4. Information materials are available in the key national languages.
5. A national strategy exists that identifies targets and role-players responsible for these issues.
6. Stakeholders collaborate in practice in regard to key public events.
7. Safety issues have visibility in relevant international days and events.
8. Stakeholders create awareness through monuments, naming of streets, meeting rooms or halls, and prizes.
9. Indirect stakeholders such as public figures, lawyers' and bar associations, magistrates' associations, Internet freedom NGOs, and women, youth and environmental groups actively promote the safety of journalists.
10. Existing hotlines and other safety mechanisms and facilities for journalists in distress have adequate visibility and can operate without undue hindrance.

One of the biggest issues regarding safety of journalists is impunity. A great number of journalists were killed, injured or kidnapped and the perpetrators were known and nothing was done to them. According to Committee to Protection for Journalists (CPJ) only 9 out of 245 cases (2006-2009) had led to a conviction. CPJ claims that in nine out of ten murders, no-one is held responsible or punished. Beckett (n.d) gives example of one scenario thus:

In 2006 Anna Politkovskaya was executed in her own apartment, apparently by contracted killers, probably as a consequence of her fearless inquiries in to corruption and human rights abuses in Russia. The international community was deeply shocked and pressure has now been put on Russian President Putin who has promised to bring her killers to justice. No-one may ever be brought to book for these killings (p. 5).

This lack of accountability is a significant concern in the Niger Delta, where perpetrators of violence against journalists often enjoy political protection.

Organisations like Reporters Without Borders and International News Safety Institute led by UNESCO raised alarm on this impunity and called for proper mechanism to end the practice. In 2012 United Nations adopted Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity with the aim of "creating a free and safe environment for journalists and media workers, both in conflict and non-conflict situations, with a view to strengthening peace, democracy and development worldwide" (Jennifer et al, 2015, p. 14). In line with this UNESCO dedicate a section in its Media Development Indicator (MDI) which deals with the question of journalists safety across different parts of the world.

### **2.3 Threats and Dangers Faced by Journalists**

Journalists face threats and dangers from internal and external actors, but external threats attract more attention than internal threats. Arulchelvan (2016) notes that great number of journalists faced different soft and hard internal threats especially in developing countries. The threats are mostly professional, economical and psychological in nature: changes in working place, cut in salary, suspension and dismissal from job and so on. Such threats and dangers affect the functions of journalists. His research further reveals that 46.7%

of the journalists interviewed said that their mental stress increased which affect their performance and concentration. This is particularly pertinent for journalists in the Niger Delta, who often work under immense pressure with limited resources, exacerbating psychological distress.

Both conventional journalists and citizen journalists are facing threats, difficulties and dangers in their daily activities. According to International News Safety Institute (INSI) (2014) 152 journalists and media workers were killed in relation to their work from January - December 2012. Female journalists face additional danger of sexual harassment, as International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) reports that out of 977 women journalists interviewed between 2013-2014 one in two experience sexual harassment. Here in Africa from 2004-2014 Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) has recorded a total of 138 incidents of violations against journalists and media workers.

Moreover, according to Committee of Protection of Journalists (CPJ) among the 70 journalists that were killed in 2013, 44% were online journalists. Tom Rhodes, CPJ representative in East Africa (cited in Jennifer, et al. 2015) explains the nature of threats and dangers faced by online journalists thus:

The level of threats against press increases every year ... as government authorities – among other actors are looking more closely at the impact of online media. Besides receiving threats online, many are tracked down via mobile phone networks and threatened further via their phone lines. We also have cases of online journalists/commentators being killed. It is becoming just as dangerous, if not more dangerous given the impact of online media, for journalists who work for online media outlets as it is for other mediums such as print and radio (p. 13).

The increasing reliance on digital communication in the Niger Delta also means journalists are vulnerable to digital attacks and surveillance, impacting their ability to communicate sensitive information safely (Onyejelem, 2025a).

Generally, there are three major forms of violence against all journalists: psychological harm, physical harm, and death threats (CGHR, 2012). INSI (2014) gives a self-explanatory list of threats and violence to journalists covering organised crime, violence and political issues:

1. Death threats (e.g. by text message)
2. Violence during protest and civil unrest
3. Violence from drug cartels expanding from one region to another (e.g. in Central America)
4. Targeting of females (journalists) specifically involving violent attack and rape
5. Kidnapping by criminal groups and drug cartels
6. Pressure from the authorities and violence by warlords and security forces
7. Violent arrest and detention by the authorities (e.g. police, military, or security forces)
8. Attacks by security forces whilst covering protests or civil unrest
9. Caught or killed in crossfire between militant group and authorities or security forces
10. Caught or killed in the crossfire of police and drug cartels
11. Targeted killings by organised crime groups or extrajudicial killings by the authorities.

In the Niger Delta, all these threats are present, with particular prevalence of kidnapping by criminal groups, violence during protests related to oil spills or resource control, and pressure from both state and non-state actors (Onyejelem, 2025b).

Among the above-mentioned threats and dangers been experienced by journalists around the world, kidnapping is one of the most frequent threats experienced by journalists. According to Picard and Storm, (2015) Western journalists, however, are not the only kidnap targets, though they tend to get higher international media coverage. Hundreds of others from

around the world have been held, attacked, taken hostage, and killed in the Middle East, Latin America, and Asia.

In 2014 alone, 119 professional journalists and eight citizen journalists were kidnapped (in 2013), according to Reporters Sans Frontiers, an organisation that tracks abuses against journalists. Ukraine, Libya, Syria, Iraq, and Mexico were the locations for most of the abductions and 90 per cent involved domestic reporters while only 10 per cent involved foreign reporters (Hajara et al., 2018).

The Niger Delta has seen numerous incidents of kidnapping, not only of foreign oil workers but also of local journalists perceived to be investigating sensitive issues. In their study Jennifer et al (2015) identify the following technological, institutional and economic challenges that are specific to digital safety of journalists and media organisation across world:

1. Surveillance, data storage capabilities and digital attack technologies are becoming less expensive and more pervasive.
2. Digital security tools are not always user friendly, leading to few journalists implementing the tools correctly.
3. Commercially available digital security tools may be too expensive for freelancers or bloggers to purchase and many tools (free or otherwise) are not user friendly for non-technologists.
4. Open-source digital security tools often lack a sustainable business model, which means they may become obsolete after a short period of time or may not be updated against vulnerabilities.
5. Denial-of-Service attacks may result in financial loss for news organisations or individual journalists.
6. Many journalists and their sources are unaware of technologists willing and able to assist them if they experience a threat or attack that is digital or digitally-relayed.
7. Many journalists and their sources are not adept at understanding data anonymisation or the use of secure technologies such as encryption.
8. There is a lack of publicly available data documenting the types of digital attacks and threats the journalists face.
9. State and non-state actors can use location tracking technology to identify media actors – and their sources – who often need confidentiality for the production of journalism.
10. The digital security of both those who practice journalism and their associates (sources, families, colleagues) can often easily be compromised via phishing campaigns. Compromised user accounts and devices can be used to identify the sources and networks of those doing journalism, leading to increased insecurity.
11. Digital security is often taught ad-hoc, if taught at all, instead of being systematic and holistic.

In the Niger Delta, where communication infrastructure can be challenging, and digital literacy varies, these digital security issues are particularly acute, further complicating the efforts of journalists to operate safely and protect their sources (Onyejelem, 2025a).

Violence against journalists is not an issue of one or two regions of the world, it is happening everywhere, the difference among the regions is the nature of the violence and the extent to which the violence is committed. IACHR (2013) reports that:

Violence against journalists in the Americas is as the result of a complex series of causes. In general, in some cases this type of violence continues to be exercised by State actors, especially in the context of public safety operations and public demonstrations, or in cases involving allegations of corruption and illegality committed by local State officials. Nevertheless,

in recent years, the number and size of organised criminal groups has increased, including drug trafficking cartels and other organised criminal groups. There are now areas of Mexico in which journalists are subjected to serious intimidation originating principally from criminal groups who seek to suppress certain information, it is extremely difficult for journalists to carry out research and publish material on issues such as organised crime, corruption, public security and similar matters (p. 15).

This description resonates strongly with the situation in the Niger Delta, where a volatile mix of state corruption, militant groups, and criminal enterprises creates an extremely dangerous landscape for journalists.

## **2.4 Safety Measures for Journalists**

Before venturing into covering crisis areas, journalists should acquire certain training on how to be safe while observing duties. Unfortunately, many journalists fall victims of threats and dangers because of their ignorance of safety measures or curiosity to break news. For instance, INSI (2014) recorded that 25% of journalists dead in Pakistan were as a result of secondary blasts when journalists have moved forward to get the story (Msughter & Abba, 2017). For journalists in the Niger Delta, this training should specifically address the region's unique risks, such as navigating treacherous waterways, understanding local power dynamics, and identifying safe havens within communities (Onyejelem, 2025b).

Most of the safety training provided to journalists centered on physical protection such as safety gear for journalists covering conflict areas, insurance, financial assistance for relocation and other provisions (Jennifer et al, 2015). Greeves (cited in Beckett, n.d.) notes that, most of concern organisation and individuals on the safety of journalists put much emphasis on training, is training enough? The major issue which media organisations are yet to tackle is financing measures necessary for journalist's safety. Tales of journalists running out of essential personal medication, lacking fitness, being unable to change and not having a full tank of fuel are rapid. Farrell (2013) observes that cost of freelance journalists per day in Syria is estimated to be between \$100-200 a day for a fixer/translator, \$100 for a driver, and \$50 for accommodation. The financial constraints faced by many Nigerian journalists mean that robust safety measures and training are often out of reach.

Moreover, to keep proper records on the safety measures application or violations around the world, International, regional and national civil society organisations have been observing and analysing journalists safety issues which at varied timing release report which gives statistics on Number and types of threats against the lives and limbs of journalists, other threats, actual attacks on journalists, killings, threats against media institutions, attacks on media institutions and disaggregated data on the above indicators relating to gender, fulltime freelance-citizen status of journalist, media platform (print, radio, TV, online), and other criteria as may be significant (e.g. rural/urban; minority group, etc.).

Another important safety measure is that of knowing the legal protection and organisations that advocate for the implementation of such legal protections at national, regional and international level. Every democratic nation in its constitution has some provision on freedom of expression and the press. At international level under the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1738 journalists and media workers covering crisis areas should be treated as civilians and neutral parties, hence, the conflicting parties should respect and protect them (INSI, 2014). International News Safety Institute provides the following Safety Code:

1. The preservation of life and safety is paramount.



2. Assignments to war and other danger zones must be voluntary and only involve experienced news gatherers and those under their direct supervision.
3. All journalists and media staff must receive appropriate hostile environment and risk awareness training before being assigned to a danger zone.
4. Employers should ensure before assignment that journalists are fully up to date on the political, physical and social conditions prevailing where they are due to work.
5. Employers must provide efficient safety equipment and medical and health safeguards.
6. All journalists should be afforded personal insurance.
7. Employers should provide free access to confidential counselling for journalists involved in coverage of distressing events.
8. Journalists are neutral observers. No member of the media should carry a firearm.
9. Governments and all military and security forces are urged to respect the safety of journalists in their areas of operation.
10. Security forces must never harass, intimidate or physically attack journalists going about their lawful business.

These guidelines offer a strong framework, but their implementation remains a critical challenge in the Niger Delta, where adherence by various actors is inconsistent.

### **III. Research Methods**

Using a conceptual framework, this study looks at how investigative journalism and risk management frameworks connect, with a particular emphasis on tactics that safeguard reporters in dangerous situations. To find recurrent themes and best practices in journalist protection, the method synthesizes existing academic literature, policy documents, case studies, and institutional reports. To define, elucidate, and link important concepts like "investigative journalism," "risk management," "safety frameworks," and "high-risk environments," conceptual analysis is used. The analysis is guided by a thematic synthesis approach, which makes it possible to spot trends, gaps, and developing approaches to risk management for investigative journalists, with a specific lens on the unique environmental, social, and political risks prevalent in the Niger Delta region. This includes considering challenges in communicating scientific aspects of environmental degradation and the impact of digital media in such a context (Onyejelem, 2025a, 2025b).

### **IV. Result and Discussion**

#### **4.1 Safety of Journalists in Nigeria**

From 1986 when Dele Giwa was murdered many journalists have equally met their untimely deaths while practicing their profession. Journalists like Enenche Akogwu of Channels Television, Ayo Ohu of the Guardian; Abayomi Ogundeji and Godwin Agbroko both of THISDAY; Bagauda Kaltho of The News; Tunde Oladepo of The Guardian and a female journalist, Bolade Fasasi, to mention but a few (Ogunleye, cited in Salau 2016). According to International Press Centre ICP (2015) between July - September 2004 (two month) about 15 journalists were abducted by gunmen in which some ransom was paid while 6 journalists were assaulted or stabbed by political thugs and police and their equipment were confiscated. Most of the perpetrators according to Unaegbu (2017) are security agents, political thugs, security details of government officials and unknown armed men.

Nigeria journalists never experienced endangerment from non-state actors as the one they experience Boko Haram. Pate and Idris (2017) corroborate this fact thus: "Indeed, at no

other time had journalists experienced such high level of risks and faced dangers to their personal, professional and institutional safety in Nigeria as they did during the period 2009-2015” (p. 159). Journalists “are exposed to attacks perpetrated by terrorists who do not appreciate the concept of journalism as well as by military who see journalists as an obstacle to the discharge of their duties (Yar’Adua & Msughter, 2023). Due to these unsafe conditions, editorial staff and reporters themselves become more restrictive in sending people to or covering beats from these conflict regions, but instead rely on second-hand reports from security agents or ‘acclaimed’ eye witness on phone” (Unaegbu, 2017, p. 175).

While the Boko Haram insurgency presented a distinct threat profile in the North-East, the Niger Delta also presents a comparable, albeit different, level of danger stemming from resource conflicts, militancy, and political violence. Journalists in the Niger Delta are routinely threatened, assaulted, or detained for reporting on issues like crude oil theft, environmental pollution by oil companies, or electoral violence (Onyejelem, 2025b). These uncontrolled attacks and violence negatively affect journalism practice in Nigeria. The most worrisome issue in this matter is that none of the suspected perpetrators was punished in all of the cases mentioned. Yusuf (cited in Unaegbu, 2017) opines that most of the perpetrators are government officials and influential people who have the political power or financial power to corrupt the judicial process. Unaegbu, (2017) further suggest that “the continuous and unresolved impunity against journalist results more from the lack of political will to enforce these frameworks and less from the absence of laws. Moreover, this complete lack of political will to act appropriately comes as little surprise, given that the phrase ‘protect your own’ holds” (p. 172).

One of the recent efforts for providing safe environment for journalists in Nigeria is Nigerian Journalists’ Safety Initiative (NJSI) launched by International Press Centre (IPC). Director of IPC Mr. Lanre Arogundade (cited in Salau 2016) explains vision and objectives of the Nigerian Journalists’ Safety Initiative (NJSI) thus:

Monitoring and documentation of attacks on journalists in Nigeria;  
Running a safety alert and help desk for journalists under threat;  
Creating better awareness about safety through Online safety manual;  
Capacity building and other forms of engagement with journalists and media outlets on safety of journalists;  
Joint plans of action with relevant stakeholders on journalists safety;  
Publishing of an annual compendium on the state of safety of journalists in Nigeria and Holding of commemorative activities to mark the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists  
(p. 2).

These initiatives are vital, but their effectiveness in a complex region like the Niger Delta depends on strong local partnerships and a nuanced understanding of specific regional threats.

## **4.2 Attacks on Media Houses**

Specific media houses were consistently threatened by Boko Haram on allegations of misrepresenting the sect. As confirmed by one correspondent, “often, they called us individually and accused one or two newspapers and radio stations of misrepresenting what they said”. They actualised their threat when the premises of Thisday newspapers were bombed simultaneously in Abuja and Kaduna in April 2012. The Abuja attack killed an employee, three passers-by and the suicide bomber, while the Kaduna blast damaged the offices of Moment and Sun newspapers. Following the incidents, This-Day’s reporter in Maiduguri (Michael) fled and remained in hiding for a long time. ThisDay Director, Eniola

Bello said, “one of the reasons Boko Haram gave to justify their attack on our Abuja office was that we were not giving their activities front page prominence. They wanted to create panic.”

The terrorists threatened Voice of America (VOA) prompting its reporter for Borno/Yobe States, Haruna Dauda Biu, to hide. The local correspondent of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Bilikisu Babangida, also fled Maiduguri after receiving a series of threats. Hamza Idris of the Trust newspapers recalled that in July, 2012, two terrorists disguised as customers visited their office and “asked of me and three of my colleagues working in the administration department. Luckily, all of us were out of the office. I later received a phone call that they would kill us. We had to stay away from Maiduguri for two months...” The Chairman of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) in Borno State confessed that, at the height of the attacks, “journalism practice in Maiduguri was almost put on hold as many journalists were labelled by security agents and government officials as sympathisers of Boko Haram whose style of report-ing allegedly celebrated the destructive acts of the terrorists.

On the other hand, the terrorists had repeatedly accused journalists of spying for security agents”. Because of the risks that characterised their operations, media houses devised safety strategies like reducing hours of broadcasts, avoiding investigative and data-driven reporting, and resorting to self-censorship. In many cases, individual media houses operated in fear of attacks by the terrorists or harassment by security officials and several relocated or disguised their premises without notice and enforced tight security measures. These experiences mirror those in the Niger Delta, where media houses and journalists are often forced into self-censorship or to adopt extreme security measures when reporting on powerful individuals or groups involved in oil bunkering, militancy, or political corruption. The precarious digital media ecosystem in the region further complicates their ability to communicate safely and effectively (Onyejelem, 2025a).

#### **4.3 Current Initiatives to Measure Risk beyond Killings**

The following currently reflect international and regional attempts of recording threats to journalists beyond killings:

1. The CPJ tally over journalists imprisoned (2000-2015) and exiled (2010-2015).
2. The Press Freedom Barometer compiled by Reporters Sans Frontieres records the number of killed journalists, netizens and media assistants on a yearly basis as well as corresponding figures on imprisonments.
3. The Journalists’ Safety Indicators, developed by UNESCO’s International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC), is a tool that assesses the situation for journalism safety in various countries. Meant to serve as a baseline against which changes related to the UN Action Plan can be tracked, the JSI framework combines quantitative indicators covering count data on different types of threats against journalists and qualitative assessments of the related actions undertaken by a range of actors (state institutions and political actors, civil society and academia, the media and intermediaries, the EU and other international organisations) when it comes to safeguarding journalists (UNESCO, 2015).
4. The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) agenda has recently generated debate regarding the potential systematic monitoring and measuring of journalism safety as an indicator of target 16.10, which aims to ‘Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements. One of the indicators of target 16.10 is proposed to measure the ‘Number of verified cases of killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and

torture of journalists, associated media personnel, trade unionists and human rights advocates in the previous 12 months.’

5. The Council of Europe (COE) online ‘Platform’ alert system, which records a variety of attacks on journalists among their member states.

The Mapping Media Freedom project, which is operated by the Index of Censorship in partnership with the European Federation of Journalists, Reporters Sans Frontières and the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom, and with support from UNESCO/IPDC, identifies threats, violations and limitations influencing journalists throughout the European Union, including also membership candidates and neighbouring countries. These global and regional efforts provide a foundation for understanding and addressing risks, but their application to specific, complex environments like the Niger Delta requires localisation and adaptation to capture the unique challenges faced by journalists in that region (Onyejelem, 2025b).

## V. Conclusion

Investigative journalism is still one of the most effective means of revealing systemic flaws, corruption, and violations of human rights, but it is also extremely dangerous in high-stress situations, particularly within the Niger Delta. This study showed that the viability of investigative reporting is dependent on the efficacy of risk management frameworks that protect journalists' practices as well as their bravery and tenacity. Multifaceted approaches that include legislative safeguards, digital security procedures, physical safety measures, and psychosocial support networks are essential for success. While individual journalists can implement personal safety measures like threat assessment and secure communication, institutional frameworks such as press unions, newsroom policies, and cross-border partnerships are essential for reducing risks and improving accountability. Additionally, authoritarian crackdowns and the increasing sophistication of digital surveillance highlight the necessity of ongoing innovation in advocacy and defensive technology. Investigative journalists must be protected in high-risk situations using a comprehensive, multi-stakeholder strategy that includes governments, media outlets, civil society, and international watchdogs. In addition to protecting journalists' safety, strengthening these frameworks also protects press freedom, democratic accountability, and the public's right to know, especially in a region as critical as the Niger Delta for national development and environmental sustainability.

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