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From the Fourth Estate of the Realm to the ‘Third Party’ in the Relationship: Public Education Role of the Media in Setting Agenda for Cordial Civilian-Military and Principal-Agency Relations

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Abstract

Although the media has played a critical role in Nigeria’s struggle for democratisation, it is not clear what role it plays in the nation’s quest for the institutionalisation of civilian control of the military for sustained democratic governance. This paper presents the findings of a qualitative study that examined the role media agenda-setting could play in influencing effective civil control of the military and positive civilian-military relations in Nigeria. Using the snowball sampling technique, 12 key informants were recruited for interviews and the findings suggest that there is a continued existence of tense relationships between civilians and the military and that the use of agenda-setting media narratives can educate the public and policymakers and influence public opinion toward the institutionalisation of civilian control of the military and enhanced civilian-military relations. The paper concludes that Nigeria’s quest for the institutionalisation of civilian control of the military is steadily sustainable. Recommendations were offered and implications discussed.

Keywords: agenda-setting theory, civilian-military relations, democracy, Nigeria, media education role, media narratives, public opinion.

1. Introduction

The media, especially newspapers, have played a critical role in Nigeria’s drive for self-determination during the colonial era. Newspapers served as a potent tool with which Nigeria’s founding fathers educated and enlightened the masses as well as ‘fought for’ and gained independence for Nigeria from British colonial masters. The colonialists did not have a monopoly of the press – obviously, that had contributed tremendously toward the successful agitations for independence. Some of the pre-independence era newspapers include *The Nigerian Pioneer*, *Anglo-Africa*, *Lagos Times*, *Eagles*, *Lagos Critic*, *Lagos Observer*, *Lagos Weekly Record* and *Gaskiya ta fi Kwabo* (Nwabueze, Ebeze, 2013). Nevertheless, the colonialist had enjoyed a monopoly of broadcasting for nearly 30 years before independence by establishing the Radio Distribution Service (RDS) in 1932, which enabled them to broadcast their propaganda by relaying the radio service of the BBC. It was not until the eve of Nigeria’s independence, in 1959, that the first indigenous broadcast outfit, the Western Nigerian Television (WTV) was established in Ibadan by Chief Obafemi Awolowo. In addition to the existing print news media have tremendously shone Nigeria’s way to self-determination (Chioma, 2020; Ubaku et al., 2014).

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With the social, economic, and political importance of the broadcast media practically demonstrated by the founding of WTV, the post-independence era triggered a regional race toward the establishment of radio and television stations by the political leaders of the three regions – Northern, Eastern and Western – that constituted Nigeria then. In the following decade, the ownership and control of the broadcast media outlets were transferred to the Federal Government of Nigeria. The media-ownership race continued to date with each of the 36 states having its own radio and TV stations. All this underscores the importance of media in any political setting (Ibrahim et al., 2019; Yusuf et al., 2020). Perhaps we might not grasp the paramount role the media play in a polity until we understand that whenever the military executed a coup against a civilian government, one of the first entities that the military swiftly captures and puts under its control is the media. Even without any further detail, this alone is sufficient to underscore the central position of the media in the military’s strategy and their importance in society, for example, for cementing civilian-military relations and educating the public and policymakers on matters of national importance. Similarly, democratically elected authorities heavily rely on the media to influence the populace and communicate policy agendas, for example, dividends of democracy, military reforms, and so on. Also, for the democratic government to communicate policies regarding the enforcement of its constitutional executive powers to control the military, the role of the media cannot be overlooked (Mangat, 2018; Nwolise, 2010; Yeibo, 2020).

With a robust media industry, a well-established military institution and a population of over 200 million, Nigeria is the largest democracy in Africa. Nigeria celebrated its 60th independence anniversary recently, on 31 October 2020. However, in addition to being a celebration of its diamond jubilee as a sovereign nation, it was also a symbolic celebration of the nation’s consolidation of democracy and democratic control of the armed forces for 22 consecutive years. For nearly 30 years of its existence as an independent nation, Nigeria was ruled by the armed forces, with the remaining 30 years accounting for its resilient democratic dispensations. The Fourth Republic which is currently in its 23rd year has been on since 1999 with five uninterrupted civilian-to-civilian transitions of political power. A military institution that has clung to the corridors of power for half of the country’s lifetime as an independent nation must, certainly, have been pervasively influential in all political ramifications (Dauda et al., 2019; Kola et al., 2020; Oshita, 2019; Thurston, 2018).

Six years until the historical handover of power by the General Abdulsalami Abubakar military regime to an elected civilian government for the first time since 1979, the then military Head of State, General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida had in mid-May 1993 warned the ranks-and-file of the military “not to be found on the other side of the democracy barricade”; stressing that they should rather “get prepared for a democratic civilian succession to which they must be *subordinate*” (Amuwo, 1995: 5) (emphasis mine). He, “for the umpteenth time” reiterated the military’s “imminent disengagement from formal politics” saying: “The military’s commitment to withdraw to the barracks is irrevocable. With the countdown to the elections in June, all seems set for the conclusion of the experimental political journey we commenced in 1986. By August, this administration will be ready to hand over the baton of leadership to an elected president” (Amuwo, 1995: 5). However, it had taken the Interim National Government that succeeded the General Babangida Administration and two successive military regimes of General Abdulsalami Abubakar and the Late General Sani Abacha for General Babangida’s ‘dream’ of having the military returned to the barracks and serve under democratically elected governments to come to fruition (Dauda et al., 2019; Shehu, 2015).

Civilian control of the military has been widely studied with civilian-military relations. The concept “civilian control” of the military is extensively used in the civilian-military relations literature to refer to the loyalty of the military (the armed forces – army, air force and navy) to the state through obedience to legitimate or recognised civilian representatives (Oshita, 2019; Tar, Bala, 2021). In other words, the term ‘civilian’ denotes “the pre-eminence of civilian institutions, based on popular sovereignty, in the decision-making process... The control of the instruments of violence must be firmly in the hands of legitimate civilian authorities” (Musa, 2018: 7).

The purpose of this paper is to appraise the public education and agenda-setting roles of the media in the facilitation of an effective civil democratic control of the armed forces and sustainable civilian-military relations in Nigeria as an emerging democracy grappling with relatively weak civilian political institutions and the need for synergy between the media and security agencies. The paper sought to answer the following research question: (1) can the media’s public education

and agenda-setting roles influence civil political institutions' policy to control the military? The paper covers conceptual and theoretical discourses and contending issues in civilian-military relations as well as an evaluation of the existing relationship between the media and security agencies and the state.

The Media as a Concept: The media has been defined variously by different schools of thought. The Nigerian Press Council defined media as “the technical devices employed in mass communication which professionals categorise into the print and the electronic media” (Yeibo, 2020: 4). However, Microsoft Encarta Encyclopaedia defines media “as a generic word, encompassing the various means of mass communication considered as a whole including television, radio, magazines, newspapers and journals together with the people involved in their production”. Furthermore, the term “media” refers to communication outlets known as the mass media. Regardless of the size of the media in any society, media can be classified based on two main criteria (1) the mechanical device or mechanism, and (2) the assumed level or degree of influence on society (Ojo, 2003). Using the first criteria, all media can be grouped into two classes (Ojo, 2003: 823-824; White, 2020). Category 1 is print media (e.g., newspapers, magazines, flyers, direct mail, flyers, billboards and any technical device that conveys a message to the “masses” by attracting their visual sense. Print media communicate information by publishing written words and images. Category 2 is electronic media: (a) radio and sound recordings that appeal to the sense of sound, and (b) television, motion pictures and video recordings that appeal to both the sense of sound and the sense of vision. Broadcast media communicates information electronically through sounds or scenes. Although a phone transmits sounds, it is usually used for more targeted communications and audiences, and therefore is not usually included in the media (Yusuf et al., 2020). Perhaps the most recent addition to electronic media is the internet. However, the internet is largely seen as a combination of print and electronic media (Baran, Davis, 2012).

The media serve a pivotal role in democratic governance and national development. The media are *sine qua non* for the effective running of every government (Nasidi, 2016; Nwabueze, Ebeze, 2013), democratic or military. Because of the power of the media in society, an 18th-century politician, Edmund Burke who pioneered in describing the media as “the ‘Fourth Estate’ of the realm”, referring to the three big powers in Medieval European society, namely “the Lords (or Nobles), the Clergy and the Commons” (McQuail, 2007). Till present day, the media are still regarded as the fourth estate of the realm (of a democratic system), the other estates being the executive, legislature, and the judiciary (Nwabueze, Ebeze, 2013; Shehu, 2015).

The Nigerian Media Ecosystem: From the emergence in 1859 of the first newspaper in the geographical region called Nigeria, *Iwe Irohin*, through the independence period to date, the publishing sector in Nigeria has greatly changed. With the proliferation of media outfits practically every day in Nigeria, mass media of high reckoning, both government and private-owned outfits, are what the country boasts of today. Nowadays, TV stations such as the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), African Independent Television (AIT), Channels Television, TVC News, among others, are starting to have a truly global audience, having embarked on satellite transmission operations. In one way or another, radio stations such as Radio Nigeria, Ray Power FM, and the numerous state and private outfits provide interesting news and current affairs programmes that impact society. In Nigeria, numerous dailies such as *Daily Trust*, *The Guardian*, *Punch*, *Daily Sun*, *ThisDay*, *Vanguard*, *The Nation*, *Daily Independent*, among others, have become dominant communication channels, providing various hard and soft news to keep society informed (Nwabueze, Ebeze, 2013; Ojo, 2018; Pate, 2011).

The media have contributed tremendously to social and political development in Nigeria – “from the pre-independence era, through to the independence era, through the time of weathering the storm of military interregnums to the present democracy we are experiencing”. The media are also soliciting mass support at various levels for democratic governments, which further boosts the civil government’s control of the military (Musa, 2018). Tejumaiye (Tejumaiye, 2011: 23) opines, “the news media shape culture, influence politics, play important role in business and affect the daily lives of millions of people, including people’s attitude, conducts and fundamental moral values.” Despite the many constraints the Nigerian media face, Nigeria’s nascent democracy has continued to be impacted in many ways positively (Nwabueze, Ebeze, 2013).

The Role of the Media in Politics: Communication is a *sine qua non* in every human endeavour – which could be as simple as interpersonal or group communication, or as complex as organisational communication. Human endeavours involving large organisations, institutions,

and systemic functions such as governance, politicking, national security, and so on correspondingly require complex, systemic communication and enlightenment (education). Here, the media shoulder that responsibility (White, 2020). The media and the military are two of the most strategic institutions of the modern state (Olofinbiyi, 2021).

While emphasising the significance of the media in society in his speech, the United States' third President, Thomas Jefferson said, "... Were it left for me to choose whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, I shall not hesitate a moment to choose the latter" (Mustapha, Abudulbaqui, 2012: 130). Also, the United States' President, John F. Kennedy was once asked President De-Gaulle of France, "How can you control your country if you do not control television?" (Orhewere, Kur, 2004: 58). Those are eloquent testimonies of how badly the state needs the media. These assertions further underscore the pertinence of the mass media in any society. Governance, in itself, is communication-based. The mass media facilitate the two-way communication process essential in bridging the gap between government and the governed, including the very essential role of ensuring that the basic values and tenets that keep a society together are promoted among the populace (Nwabueze, Ebeze, 2013). In other words, both the military and the media are relevant in the modern state. Hence, the need for synergy between the military and the media in improving civilian-military relations.

The Military as a Concept: According to Yeibo (Yeibo, 2020: 6), "the history of modern state-making started with the military: the military was used to establish and then consolidate the state, and the military has continued to be used to sustain the state." The military has been defined by the Concise Oxford Dictionary as relating to or characteristics of a soldier or armed forces. The armed forces of a nation usually comprise its army, navy, and air force. Martins Edmonds, however, provides a more concise definition of the term "armed services as synonyms". The term military is defined as "that state, organisation or group of organisations permanently established by constitutional law, enjoys a monopoly of a certain category of weapons and equipment and is responsible for the constrained application of violence or coercive force to eliminate or deter anything or body that is considered to threaten the nation-state and the interest singly or collectively of its citizens (Nwolise, 2010; Oshita, 2019; Yeibo, 2020).

Tilly further categorised the military based on the environment such as land, sea, air or space within which they predominantly operate. Thus, the dimension of the various armed services concerning their specialisation is brought to the fore with the army operating on land, navy on the sea and the air force on the air (Yeibo, 2020). All militaries, the world over have their roles clearly stated in the country's constitution. The Nigerian military is no exception and has its defined roles in the Nigerian constitution of 1999 as amended. With strict adherence to the constitutional roles as been enshrined in the Nigerian Constitution, the armed forces will improve on the civilian-military relations in Nigeria (Oshita, 2019; Tar, Bala, 2021).

Overview of the Relationship between Civilians and the Military in Nigeria: In Africa, including Nigeria, there have been many excesses and tensions between people and their military counterparts. To summarise, over time, the resident's protector against external attack has "metamorphosed to become the 'feared'" (Olofin, 2019: 64). Chukwunonye (Chukwunonye, 2019) revealed that colonial military forces were employed to conduct raids and punitive expeditions against indigenous peoples and rebellious monarchs, resulting in a long history of fear and mistrust between civilians and military personnel. A large authoritarian imprint on civilian life was inescapable in Nigeria because of decades of military domination, necessitating the creation of strategies to engineer civic virtue cultivation in the promotion of democracy (Babatunde, 2015: 3; Olofin, 2019).

Many African countries, including Nigeria, have seen long periods of military rule marked by bloody coups and allegations of human rights violations because of the military's interference into politics (Hungnikpo, 2012: 2). During the 1990s, the continent underwent a continuous shift from a single form of authoritarian rule to a democratic path, as well as a decline in military authority, according to Olofin (Olofin, 2019) and Ukase (Ukase, 2014: 10). Despite the spread of democracy over much of Africa, civil-military relations remained tense in many parts of the continent (Hungnikpo, 2012: 2). Despite democratisation, postcolonial governments failed to reform and reorient the military to fit the expected tasks in a democratic society and to play their own part in upholding principles (Chukwunonye, 2019; Olofin, 2019).

In Nigeria, for example, mistrust between civilians and the military is rooted in a 30-year history of military rule marked by allegations of human rights atrocities by the armed forces.

However, with Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999, and particularly in the aftermath of the Cold War, the concept of modern military-civilian interactions has gained prominence in national security strategy and discussion around the world (Olofin, 2019). In Nigeria, successive governments have worked hard to professionalise the military and bring civil-military interactions to the forefront. The military is being tried to be professionalised, re-educated, and instilled with a patriotic, apolitical mindset. Civil-Military Relations units/directors are now included as part of the services hierarchy, and military-civil relations courses are now included in cross-service military personnel training schedules (Babatunde, 2015: 4; Olofin, 2019).

The mistrust between civilians and the military, as in Nigeria, is rooted in a history of 30 years of military rule marred by allegations of human rights abuses by the armed forces. However, since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999 and following global developments in policy direction, Olofin says that "commitment at the national level to foster cordial civil-military relations has birthed national policies on security with components on civil-military relations by successive democratic governments; all in a bid to entrench true civil-military relations into mainstream security governance" (Olofin, 2019: 65).

Olofin (Olofin, 2019) goes on to explain that, to keep up with these government initiatives, the Nigerian Armed Forces and the civilian population are implementing several public confidence-building programmes to provide avenues for communication, trust, and accountability. Perhaps nowhere has open military-civilian cooperation been more needed than in north-eastern Nigeria. Due to the active insurgency by the Ahlus-Sunnah Group for Preaching and Jihad, the military has been present in the civilian life of the people of Borno State for more than seven years. Soldiers in close proximity to people can also be seen in other parts of the country when major military operations are underway. In these domains, close military-civilian links have consequences for Nigeria's civil-military relations and national security (Olofin, 2019; Tar, Bala, 2021).

Nigeria's return to civilian rule in April 1999 ushered in a renewed hope. But the nature of the political transition that would facilitate this change remained an issue of contention among scholars. Some argue that a smooth transition to democratic governance will speedily assure the enthronement of democracy if the adequate institutional design is crafted for the new system (Adejumobi, 2010). Others contend that given the depth of the decay of the political infrastructure and democratic culture of society, entrenched dominant interests will not likely give way easily, and the process of transition to democracy and good governance will be in two phases: first when the civilian government is consummated with the conduct of elections and second when democratic institutions are strengthened and democratic culture reigns (Adejumobi, 2010). Current evidence suggests sustaining democracy and good governance in Nigeria as well as fairly effective control of the military by the civilian authority are steadily achievable (Tar, Bala, 2021).

Constitutional Provisions on the Civilian Control of the Nigerian Military: It is pertinent for us to get an insight into some of the relevant provisions of the 1999 Constitution if we must understand "the rationality of civilian-military relations in Nigeria and their implications for policy directions of the civilian government", especially during the (current) Fourth Republic. According to Tafida (Tafida, 2015: 85), "The constitution is a fundamental set of principles upon which Nigeria is governed under a liberal-democratic arrangement." The constitutional provision has some implications for the conduct of civilian-military relations in Nigeria. The 1999 Constitution identifies three key establishments that are directly involved in matters of civilian-military relations: the military, the executive and legislative arms of the Nigerian state (Tafida, 2015: 186).

Tafida (Tafida, 2015: 85-86) further outlined the principle of civilian leadership's supremacy and control over the military establishment as follows: "first, the constitution designates the president as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. The president has executive authority over the military, which includes the appointment and advancement of military commanders, as well as the military's operational use. Section 218(1) and (2). Tafida went on to explain that military leaders (service chiefs) for the Army, Navy, and Air Force, as well as other branches of the armed services, are appointed, promoted, and disciplined by the president (Section 217(1)). Furthermore, the president has the authority to delegate responsibility to any member of the armed forces, implying delegation without recourse to the military's hierarchical command structure (Section 218(3) and (4) [a-b]). Second, according to Tafida, the National Assembly has the legislative authority to determine the military's composition and make provisions for its maintenance, training, and equipping (Sections 217(2), 219(a-b), and 220(1-2)); and third, the executive and legislative branches of government have the authority to subject the military to objective control

through its leadership structure (Sections 217(2), 219(a-b), and 220(1-2)). Both arms of government are empowered by the constitution to work with the military to determine operational functions within the military's primary role of protecting the Nigerian state from external threats and secondary role of assisting the government in providing internal security (Section 217(2) [a-d]; the existence and operation of two bodies (the National Defence Council and the National Security Council) through which the civilian top leadership interacts with the military's top leadership (the service chiefs) to articulate policy direction in matters relating to military and other security establishment activities (See Second Schedule, Sections 16 and 17, Sections 25 and 26.)"

Furthermore, Tafida (Tafida, 2015: 86) outlined that "the 1999 constitutional provisions can be used to support three different points of view. First, in terms of its composition, operational tasks, funding, training, and upkeep, the military is under the supervision of constitutionally appointed civilian authorities. Second, the civilian government's executive and legislative branches have authority over the military's composition and functions. The third is connected to the military's exposure to dual controls. The president has the power to appoint top military officers, exercise disciplinary authority, make promotions decisions, and define the military's operational use. As part of its role in preventing executive abuses, the National Assembly has the authority to legislate on topics about the military's composition, operational use, and funding."

Theoretical Framework – (1) The Agenda-Setting Theory: The agenda-setting theory was developed as a study in 1968 and first introduced in 1972 by Drs. McCombs and Donald Shaw (Freeland, 2012). The theory, also known as the 'agenda-setting function of the mass media', suggested that the media set the public agenda by telling the public what to think about, although not exactly what to think. In its most basic sense, agenda-setting is the creation of public awareness and concern of salient issues by the news media. The two most basic assumptions of agenda-setting are: (i) the press and the media do not reflect reality; they filter and shape it, and (ii) media concentration on a few issues and subjects leads the public to perceive those issues as more important than other issues. The time frame for this is one of the most critical aspects of the agenda-setting role in mass communications (Chaffee, 2021; Freeland, 2012; Langer, Gruber, 2021).

Agenda-setting occurs through a cognitive process known as "accessibility," which implies that the more frequently and prominently the news media covers an issue, the more that issue becomes accessible in the audience's memory (Freeland, 2012: 3). Three fundamental types of agenda-setting have been identified by Freeland (Freeland, 2012: 4), namely, "public, media and policy agenda-setting. Public agenda-setting focuses on the audience's agenda while media agenda-setting focuses on the influence of the mass media on the audience. Policy agenda-setting deals with how media and public agendas might influence the decisions of elite policymakers."

This part of the theory has since been explored by other scholars who want to further examine the factors that influence elite policymakers' agendas (Freeland, 2012; Walgrave, Val Aelst, 2006).

(2) The Principal-Agent Theory: The premise that civil-military relations are fundamentally a sort of strategic interaction between civilian masters (primary) and their military employees is at the basis of agency theory (clients). Civilians choose the methods by which the military can be monitored in this strategic interaction. The methods chosen are based on civilians' expectations of how submissive the military is to their authority.

In Feaver's terminology, submission or obedience is "action," whereas rebellion or reluctance to obey is "dodging" (Beaker, 2007). The military decides whether to follow in this manner based on military predictions of whether evasion would be detected and, if so, whether civilians will punish them. These expectations are a result of the overlap between civilian and military actors' interests, as well as the actors' political power (Feaver, 2003: 3).

It is worth pausing here to consider what the terms "work" and "evasion" actually mean. Work is mostly trouble-free – the agent is productive when she completes the tasks allocated to her by her boss. When it comes to the military, it works when it tries to meet the demands of civilian superiors. On the other hand, "evasion" necessitates more investigation. Evasion is just a failure to act, and it is frequently coupled with sloth and overall lethargy. While this may be true in some cases, it is not the primary meaning of the phrase as employed in agency theory. Because the military may pursue aggressive military and/or political aims, but it will avoid if these goals conflict with the civilian director's wishes (Beaker, 2007).

In the context of civil-military relations, "what civilians want" is, of course, a complicated and multidimensional subject that goes much beyond standard economic applications of principal-

agent theory (Beaker, 2007). The civilian director's aims, according to Feaver, are twofold: first, they want security from external threats, and second, they want political control of the military. The following is a breakdown of the two-pronged distinction:

Feaver's professional objective, according to Beaker (Beaker, 2007), comprises the following:

1. "Whether the military is carrying out the requests of citizens, including circumstances where civilians have voiced preferences for both the "what" and "how" of a certain action."
2. "Whether the military is carrying out its responsibilities to the utmost extent possible in response to civilian requests."
3. "Whether the military is qualified (as assessed by some criterion of reasonableness) to carry out the requests of civilians."

The relationship objective can be broken down into the following categories:

1. "Whether the civilians make the major political decisions (i.e., there is no de facto or de jure coup) and whether these decisions are objective rather than symbolic."
2. "Which choices should be made by civilians, and which should be left to the military?"
3. "Whether the military, even when carrying out civilian employment orders, avoids any behaviour that may undermine civilian supremacy in the long run" (Feaver, 2003: 61).

Review of Literature on the Agenda Setting Theoretical Perspective: The media's ability to set the agenda for society by focusing public attention on a few major societal concerns is a well-documented phenomenon. The agenda-setting hypothesis was investigated for the first time by McCombs and Shaw (see McCombs, Shaw, 1972). According to agenda-setting theory, what the media considers important will eventually be reflected in what community members consider vital. It helps to shape public opinion and disseminate information about the benefits and drawbacks of a certain issue. When agendas are created, the focus of attention shifts from immediate effects on attitudes and opinions to long-term effects on cognition (Protest, McCombs, 1991). People obtain accurate knowledge about public events via the media, according to Lange and Lange (Lange, 1959), but readers and viewers also learn how much importance they allocate to a topic based on its focus in the news media.

According to Okwuchukwu (Okwuchukwu, 2014), newspapers send a range of signals regarding the importance of subjects in the daily news, such as a front-page main piece, another front-page perspective, massive headlines, and so on. Television news provides other markers of prominence, such as the quantity of time spent on the news storey, in addition to the opening item on the programme. These signals are repeated daily to effectively communicate the importance of each topic, as Okwuchukwu (Okwuchukwu, 2014) pointed out. In other words, the news media can create an agenda to focus the public's attention on a small number of issues that have an impact on public opinion. The impact of the media on the formulation of significant perceived political problems is the focus of agenda-setting theory. Ghorparde (Ghorparde, 1986) defines agenda setting as a relational concept that refers to the transfer of precedence from agenda initiators (arguments) to agenda adopters (consumers).

There is a correlation between what the media thinks is relevant and what you believe to be important in public awareness, according to agenda-setting research. The concept depicts how the media can influence our opinions. According to Ngoa (Ngoa, 2006), setting the agenda refers to the media audience's acceptance of particular problems, events, and persons as important since the media caused people to think about and talk about them. McQuail and Windahl (McQuail, Windahl, 1981) stated that the media can affect public opinion simply by paying attention to some topics while neglecting others (adding that) the hypothesis appears to have evaded the early empirical findings' scepticism about opinions on the media's tremendous effect (Okwuchukwu, 2014).

Even though the media agenda has a substantial influence, it does not determine the public agenda, the public agenda is not driven by the media's presentation of information and indicators about object prominence and features. The media's huge influence has done nothing to undermine democracy's core assumption that the people have the wisdom to guide the path of their country, state, and society (Okwuchukwu, 2014). People are said to be fully competent in determining their own and the public's crucial connection to the media's topics and aspects (McCombs, 2005). The media only sets the agenda when citizens believe their news items to be noteworthy. The volume or frequency of reporting, the level of importance attributed to the issue covered, the degree of conflict coming from the stories, and the media's cumulative effect over time are all factors that go into creating the agenda, according to Folarin (Folarin, 1998). In his contribution, Wood (Wood, 1983) noted that virtually all communication researchers and authors seem to agree

that the media have the power and position to determine what is important to their audience. The media does so in three ways: by setting tangible goals, granting status, and influencing the agenda. Explain the concept of “status conferral.” It is intimately tied to the concept of agenda-setting, according to Ngoa (Ngoa, 2006), and pertains to the media’s ability to confer or transmit status, as well as improve the authority of individuals, groups, and organisations, and even legitimising their status in the public eye. Agenda-setting, on the other hand, refers to the media’s ability to increase the importance of a topic in the public’s mind. Agenda setting, according to Dearing and Rogers (Dearing, Rogers, 1992), is “an ongoing competition between advocates of causes for the attention of media professionals, the public, and policy elites.” Individuals seeking to use the media to help them prioritise, particularly in defining political reality, was present, but without a label agenda, according to Ngoa (Ngoa, 2006). As a result, White (White, 1973) characterises the media’s ability to influence electoral campaigns as a primordial, all-encompassing political power free of any constraints (Okwuchukwu, 2014).

In other countries, the media sets the agenda for public discourse and controls what people think and speak about, a power that is usually reserved for kings, parties, and priests. The media swarmed on town in 1993 after the annulment of what most observers and participants considered to be the fairest and free election ever held in Nigeria, demanding that the election be overturned and re-certified. Most Nigerians tend to share this media agenda. The agenda-setting theory for mass communication is thought to have shown itself in the Nigerian media consensus to prosecute General Ibrahim Babangida, the country’s then-military ruler, for overturning Nigerians’ collective will by annulling Mr. Abiola’s election as President (Ngoa, 2006; Okwuchukwu, 2014).

As a mass communication theory, agenda setting has become extremely intricate, and (McCombs, Shaw, 1972) they have updated their assumptions by postulating “a need for orientation” as a crucial factor in people’s readiness to enable the media to mould their thinking. In contrast, McQuail (McQuail, 1987) said that, despite recent research, there is insufficient evidence to indicate a causal relationship between the public’s order of priorities and the media’s order of priority for problems. He also says that scepticism about agenda setting as a theory, stems from theoretical ambiguity as well as strict methodological criteria and that as a result, “theory of agenda-setting remains in the state of plausible but unproven idea.”

As a result, agenda-setting theory develops and broadens in scope and dimensions. A recent development is a focus on “the second level of agenda-setting,” as McCombs and Shaw refer to it. The agenda is an abstraction, according to the “second level of agenda-setting” concept and can incorporate items other than themes. The “opening up” of the concept of agenda-setting to the second level, according to Severin and Tankard (Severin, Tankard, 2001), has widened the theory to include effective traits or situations. It is also advocated that the notion of agenda-setting be expanded to include the concept of “agenda building,” which is a collaborative process in which the media, the public, and the government influence one another in determining which issues to prioritise (Lang, 1983; Okwuchukwu, 2014).

A Criticism of the Agenda Setting Theory: The “causal order of agenda-setting,” or the order in which the media agenda is created, is critical in determining whether the media influences the public agenda, or the audience influences the media agenda (Okwuchukwu, 2014). McCombs and Shaw (McCombs, Shaw, 1972) argued about whether the media had an impact on public policy. Their research discovered a strong link between media and public agendas, but they could not say which one influences the other. According to Severin and Tankard (Severin, Tankard, 2001), there are certainly alternative models for this relationship, the main model reflecting the flow and demonstrating that the primary concerns of the public will constitute both the identification of issues by political elites and those of the media, a fundamental process of political theory and the logic of free media.

Infante et al. (Infante et al., 1990) indicated, however, that the theory of media agenda shaping was left with a reasonable but unproven premise, because it is fraught with theoretical ambiguity and methodological faults, according to Okwuchukwu (Okwuchukwu, 2014). The concept of multimedia agenda-setting begs the question of who sets the agenda in the first place. To put it another way, who sets the agenda for the media? Furthermore, observing all the media to which an individual is exposed and determining how the individual is influenced is one of the challenges in setting the agenda.

Review of Literature on the Agency Theoretical Perspective: Pfeffer makes it clear right at the start of his book that there are two aspects of civil-military relations to consider:

the fundamental issue of establishing and maintaining civilian control over military power on the one hand, and the day-to-day control of policy decisions on the other. It is the latter that Agency theory is aimed at. To be clear, the problem is not about preventing the military from controlling all aspects of government; rather, it is about ensuring civilian control over those aspects of government that directly or indirectly affect the military, such as the defence budget. However, this continues to be a significant concern for the democratic state. The army's actual coercive force is a problem in this sense, but it also wields authority in other ways, such as its need for specific understanding in military matters, the general prestige of the army, etc. (Beaker, 2007).

The dangers of an army with too much power in this area include the chance that it may consume the state's resources, possibly to the point of collapse, or that it will conduct wars that are incompatible with the interests and will of the society it serves (Beaker, 2007; Feaver, 2003: 5). The principle of democratic governance – that in a democracy, citizens maintain the right to decide all matters of the state through their elected representatives, even in areas where specialists (such as the military) may have more knowledge – is perhaps the most essential of these practical factors. “In a democracy, civilians have a right to be wrong,” Pfeiffer correctly states (Feaver, 2003: 65).

Huntington's (Huntington, 1995) method, which Feaver regards to be the dominant model, was intentionally developed as an alternative to Feaver's civil-military interactions paradigm. When it comes to comprehending the day-to-day political control of the military, Janowitz's (Janowitz, 1960) model is no different from Huntington's approach on any basic issue (Feaver, 2003: 9). The main distinction between Feaver and Huntington is that, while non-physical determinants of behaviour (such as beliefs, norms, and identity) are not deemed unimportant, Feaver focuses on physical causes. The essential variable in civil-military relations, according to Huntington (and Janowitz), is identity, namely the identity of the military officer as a professional (Beaker, 2007).

In exchange, Feaver developed the principle-agent theory, which is a framework commonly used in economic and political study, and this model is built on it. Its goal is to resolve agency issues, notably between actors in positions of superiority or authority (primary) and their subordinates, as the name implies (agents). The employer-employee relationship is perhaps the most well-known example. The purpose of primary agent theory in such instances is to address the problem of how the employer assures that the employee is doing what is expected of them, or, in other words, how the employer ensures that the employee is “working” rather than “evading.” The agent-agent relationship, according to Feaver, may be simply applied to the topic of civil-military interactions, and thus can be considered an “interesting special case of the general agency problem” (Feaver, 2003: 12-13).

Feaver invented the term “agency theory” to describe this “special case” because it has distinct characteristics and is not universally applicable to agent-other-agent connections (Feaver, 2003: 55). Allow the army to warn you against foolish adventures, and even to harshly counsel you when necessary. Let the army, on the other hand, faithfully follow these commands. It would be preferable to serve the republic even if it meant making a fool of yourself than to repudiate it with wisdom (Beaker, 2007).

2. Materials and methods

This study was grounded upon two theoretical perspectives – the agenda-setting theory of the media (McCombs, Shaw, 1972) and the principal-agency theory (Feaver, 1998, 2003). The agenda-setting theory was employed to analyse (discuss) the results of the study in light of the effect of the mass media on public opinion about civilian-military relations while the principal-agency theory was used to analyse theme number four in the thematic analysis of the discussion of the study's results.

Research Design: This study focuses on analysing the first-hand verbal responses of people with military career experience as well as scholars, professionals and experts in media studies and civilian-military relations. These formed the researcher's sampling frame; hence a qualitative survey, specifically, the key informant interview (KII) approach was employed (e.g., see Bailey, 2008).

Data Collection Technique, Procedure and Research Locations: Semi-structured interviews were used to record the participants' responses. The semi-structured interview was preferred because it offered the researcher the opportunity to ordinarily ask inquisitive questions in friendly and semi-restricted ways (e.g., see Bailey, 2008). Several interview sessions were conducted whenever the researcher could gain access to a subject of the research that appropriately fit into his sampling frame. A few of the interviews were conducted after the researcher had begun data

analysis had commenced and figured out that gaining information from some professionals or experts would enhance my data analysis (e.g., those who are in top management positions).

A total of 12 interviews were had between early September and mid-October 2020 in Damaturu (the Yobe State capital) and Maiduguri (the Borno State capital) with six participants from each of the cities. All the 12 participants are men six of who had military career experience (either serving or retired military officers) while the remaining six were civilians with expertise and professionalism in civilian-military relations: three academic scholars one each from the Department of History, Sociology and Political Science of the University of Maiduguri; and three media editorial managers with experience in defence reporting. Whereas all the civilian participants including three retired military officers were interviewed in Maiduguri, only one serving (air force) military officer was interviewed there with the remaining two serving army officers interviewed in Damaturu. The longest interview lasted for about 34 minutes while the shortest lasted for 19 minutes.

Sampling Frame and Sampling Technique: The emphasis of the sampling frame was chiefly to find individuals who could provide detailed information about the role media plays in shaping the government's policy on civilian control of the military and civilian-military relations in Nigeria. Hence, the researchers focused on interviewing participants who possessed enough experience, knowledge, expertise, and professionalism in the field. Because the present study adopted a qualitative research design approach with a sampling frame hinged on career professionalism and expertise, the snowball sampling technique was used to identify relevant potential participants having those qualities through the guidance of existing participants (Patton, 2014). Most of the military officers (serving and retired) that were interviewed occupied middle military ranks; all the academics that were interviewed had a PhD degree, and all the media practitioners reached editorial/management positions.

Research Ethics, Data Analysis and Data Management: The participants were briefed about the problem and aim of the study. All of them were verbally permitted to be interviewed and the information, they provided to be used purposely for the present study. The identities of the participants interviewed were not made public because of ethical reasons. For data analysis, the thematic technique (e.g., see Clarke, Braun, 2017) was used. All the themes identified in the text were scrutinised to ensure that they related to identified codes. Five dominant themes were identified: (1) media-military relations influence on democratic control of the military, (2) civilian-military relations influence on democratic control of the military; (3) challenges of media-civilian-military relations; (4) policymaking influence on civilian control of the military in the principal-agency theory perspective; and (5) solutions, or the way forward.

To simplify data analysis and coding as well as themes identification, a code was designed to identify each participant in the results. Since the interviewees' names and identities were concealed, the data used to design the codes were (i) the type of interview performed (KII), (ii) the interviewee's serial number assigned by the researcher (e.g., 01) and (iii) the interviewee's nature of job or career (e.g., PhD-UA = Doctorate University Academic; S-MEO = Senior Media Editorial Officer; S-NAO = Serving Nigerian Army Officer; S-NAFO = Serving Nigerian Air Force Officer; R-MO = Retired Military Officer). All their names were listed alphabetically and serially numbered from 1 to 12. Because the interviews were done using a smartphone, all the data were captured in digital electronic format. Only the relevant portions of the interviews were transcribed and used in this paper. Also, all the hard copies of the transcribed data used in data analysis that contained the identities of the interviewees have been destroyed after writing.

3. Discussion

1. *Media-Military Relations Influence on Democratic Control of the Military:* To determine the ways of enhancing the democratic control of the military, consolidating the growing democracy, and boosting the efficiency of the Nigerian military, several aspects deserve serious consideration. One of these is the need to enhance the relationship between the media, armed forces, and civilian authority. As this study focuses on the media agenda influencing policy agenda of policymakers towards institutionalising true democracy and adopting positive measures to reform the Nigerian armed forces to enhance stronger civilian control of the military, Participant KII-R-MO-03 believes that the "media, despite their challenges were instrumental in returning power to elected civilians in 1999. Educating the public on the importance of democracy and civil governance is paramount." A few other participants share similar views with that participant, especially Participant KII-PhD-

UA-07 who stresses that “During the General IBB through to General Abdulsalami regimes, the media played a key role in pressuring the military to hand over power to elected Nigerians and return to the barracks.” They stated that the military’s return to the barracks was influenced by the media. If it had not been for media pressure, IBB would not have stepped down. In fact, he would not have formed an Interim National Government led by a civilian, the Late Mr. Earnest Shonekan, to succeed him; if not for media pressure, General Abdulsalami would not have thought it appropriate to prepare for elections and hand over, in 1999, to Obasanjo.

While emphasising the constitutional role of the media for nation-building, Participant KII-S-MEO-01 notes that “Journalists have a constitutional role to monitor governance and operations of security agencies and therefore, the military should discontinue its old ways of dealing with the media neither should they assume that journalists are their enemies.” Hence the need to strengthen ‘unincentivised’ relations between the military and media, not based on money or any incentives but based on real confidence.

Traditionally, military administrations are associated with coup d’états and countercoups, often which are bloodily fatal, as well as the abuse of human rights and, above all, the suspension of democratic institutions. Participant KII-S-MEO-09 maintains that “...there is no denying the fact that the Nigerian media suffered repression and lack of press freedom sometimes.” But according to the participant, the media resiliently absorbed the ‘shock’ defiantly “and continued calling for the enthronement of democratic governance in the country, the respect for human rights and press freedom.”

Here we are now enjoying the hard-fought-for democracy despite the rising security and economic challenges. Moreover, despite the literature demonstrates a lack of cordial relationships between the media and military (e.g., see [Musa, 2018](#)), a phenomenon that sometimes is observable in real life (for example, the military temporarily shut down the Maiduguri regional office of the *Daily Trust* newspaper over allegations that the newspaper published a military classified information). This behaviour often gets journalists and media organisations into trouble, especially regarding publishing sensitive information about security and military strategies without authorisation ([Ibrahim, 2020](#)). In such circumstances, “the major complaint against the media is that it compromises national security with its coverage of military activities” (Participant KII-S-MEO-08). The participant adds that “Despite the ‘cat and mouse’ relationship between the media and the military, it is not always bad; sometimes, in fact, most of the time the relationship is cordial.” One can testify to this assertion if one notices that all the three segments of the Nigerian military (the army, air force and navy) have a functional Twitter handle and other social media sharing information with the public about their activities such as media and press conferences, press releases and the various peacekeeping operations across Nigeria. Arguably, according to Participant KII-R-MO-12, “...fracas often occurs between the media and the military when there is a breach of journalistic ethics, on the part of the media, or an excessive application of force extra-judicially on the part of the military.” The participant believes that “A win-win situation can be created if journalists adhere to journalistic ethics and obey military specifications involving publicity and coverages of news and events.” However, there is the need for a change of the narratives on both parts of the media and the military, including researchers in academia.

Proffering their opinion on how to achieve cordial and synergised civilian-military relationship, Participant KII-PhD-UA-05) says, “Positive media-military relations values should be promoted by the military, the media and the government.” The participant went further to cite an example that such as “billboards, murals, pamphlets can be used to educate and enlighten the public through portraying media-military relations as well as civilian-military relations in a good light, especially in conflict zones” and that such promotional messages as “‘the armed forces are your friends’, ‘the armed forces and media are two sides of the same coin’, etc. can be used extensively to change the narrative for the better.” All the participants unanimously believed that “With the nearly three decades of military rule, Nigeria must not afford to let negative narratives slip it back to the grip of military juntas as has happened in the Republics of Mali, Guinea Bissau, Burkina Fasso, etc. recently.” Hence, according to Participant KII-S-NAO-11, “with a change of the negative narrative regarding the sour relationship between the media and military, a positive atmosphere of collaboration can be created for nation-building and unity. All this needs planned and long-term media education and enlightenment. Participant KII-S-NAO-11 went further to admit that “The military has safeguarded Nigeria’s unity. Current military reforms, I believe, are propelling them forward; they are unlikely to mutiny against civilian authorities again.” This

underscores the fact the media is relied upon to enlighten the public and set the agenda for continued civilian control of the military and improved civilian-military relations in the country, according to an African continental as well as a global trend.

The media may have never been sacrosanct to the workings of the military as they are in the 21st century, which is characterised by robust and pervasive information and communication technologies like never before. With advanced cybersecurity technologies employing the use of the internet of things and artificial intelligence such as unmanned aerial vehicles, or drones, the armed forces can strategically deploy such technologies and fight and win wars in cyberspace in addition to the ability to fight and win wars on the media using military propaganda and factual information dissemination.

Security is of critical importance not only to Nigeria as a nation but also to individuals and groups irrespective of circumstances. On this note, Participant KII-R-MO-03 stresses that “Since it is said that ‘survival is the first law of life’, it is the responsibility of the media to set agenda for mutual respect through the provision of accurate information to the public and the military’s need to protect sensitive information that borders on national security.” Unfortunately, despite Nigeria has been involved in internal security operations in most of the states of the federation because of the Boko Haram insurgency, the conflict between farmers and herdsmen, ethnoreligious conflict, oil bunkering, armed banditry, and so on; in all these, according to Participant KII-S-NAO-04, “there had not been any laid down media policy to put things in the right perspective.... The military has been brought to constant contact with the civil society which requires cordial relationship”. “Unfortunately,” as Participant KII-PhD-UA-06 laments, “the relationship between the Nigerian military and the civil society, including the media has not been so cordial”. This is despite the numerous seminars and workshops organised to cement the relationships between the media and security agencies, there has always been mistrust among these agencies in Nigeria. Since a cordial media-military (as well as civilian-military) relations is fundamental to the Nigerian polity, this requires careful use of the media to set agenda capable of influencing the government’s policy on military reform and boosting media-military relations to ensure sustained control of the military by civil the authority for nation-building.

2. *Civilian-Military Relations Influence on Democratic Control of the Military*: On a general note, Nigeria, as an emerging democracy with weak political institutions faces challenges relating to systemic stability and continuity, especially given that it has experienced incessant military coups and prolonged military rule. This does not only pose challenges to the democratisation process but also to the nature of civilian-military relations, which ultimately provides an insight into the democratic control of the military for sustained democracy. Shedding light on this issue and issue related to foreign influence, Participant KII-PhD-UA-07 opines that, “The civilian-military relations in Nigeria, an emerging liberal-democracy, should be understood within the context of three considerations. The participant went on to elucidate the three critical points as follows: “To begin with, Nigeria experienced periods of military rule because of coups and possible civilian government before focusing on establishing democratic governance. As a result, it has a history of poor democratic institutions, with elite retired military leaders maintaining enormous political power in the country. Two, due to the relative lack of institutionalisation of democratic culture in the polity, developing democratic institutions that are directly responsible for the supervision of the military establishment are generally unstable. As a result, the government devises methods to enforce its authority on the military. All of these need the employment of broad media agenda-setting narratives. Three, Nigeria’s democratic transition cannot be understood ‘in isolation’ from the globalisation of democratic liberalisation and media. As a result, foreign forces act as an external variable, either directly or indirectly, in pushing for political changes in Nigeria are vital.”

In contemporary civilian-military relations in a democracy such as Nigeria, the primary focus of analysis is based on two crucial issues: (i) who controls the military and (ii) how the control is made possible (Musa, 2018; Tar, Sunday, 2017). In a liberal democracy such as Nigeria, the elected civilian leadership is expected to exercise control on the military – the media have a role to play here. In what seems to be a practical demonstration of the sustained loyalty of the armed forces to the Nigerian democratically elected civilian authority and the sour relations between them and civilians, the Nigerian Army has on 14 October 2020 reaffirmed its loyalty to the President, the Nigerian Army and the nation while condemning the peaceful protests (which are ongoing at the time of this writing and are gradually turning restive) code-named #EndSARS by the Nigerian

youth across many states calling on the Federal Government to reform the Nigeria Police Force and disband the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) unit of the Police over wide allegations of extra-judicial use of force on alleged criminals that sometimes culminated in the loss of lives and property. An online news site 'Sahara Reporters' reported the Acting Director, Nigerian Army Public Relations, Colonel Sagir Musa who described the protesters as "subversive elements and troublemakers" further said that The Nigerian Army desires to reassure law-abiding individuals that it is deeply committed to maintaining peace, security, and democracy in Nigeria. The Nigerian Army reaffirms its unwavering devotion to President Muhammadu Buhari, Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, and the country's Constitution. The Nigerian Army is prepared to support civil authorities in any way required to maintain law and order (Sahara Reporters, 2020 October 15).

However, the arena of civilian-military relations in Nigeria, an emerging democracy, differs from what obtains in well-established democracies such as the United States. Hence, Nigeria's approach to civil control of the military could be unique to it. Nevertheless, civilian-military relations are a critical factor that must be considered when examining civilian control of the military and the sustenance of democracy. Responding to a question on this issue, Participant KII-R-MO-10 opines that, "The processes being utilised for democratic control of the military in Nigeria may neither conform to what obtains in the advanced democracies nor be uniform for all emerging democracies." According to the participant, This is due to historical disparities, the legitimacy of democratic institutions of the state, the function of the military hierarchy, the involvement of foreign interests in supporting or undermining the emergence of democratic civilian-military relations, and, to some extent, the dominant media narratives.

3. *Challenges of Media-Civilian-Military Relations*: Civilian-military relations in Nigeria may have been frosty; however, the relationship between the Nigerian military and the civil citizens was not raised on the platform of "mistrust, mutual suspicion and hostility. Extensive media campaigns can be employed to mend the sour relations" as Participant KII-R-MO-10 put it. The military's intrusion into "political governance and its accompanying dictatorship inexorably" led to the uncordial relationship (Musa, 2018; Tar, Bala, 2021). Ordinarily, the average Nigerian citizen perceives the military and what the institution stands for with suspicion, a situation that is contrary to the practice in advanced democracies where military men are often celebrated as heroes (e.g., see Musa, 2018; Tar, Sunday, 2017); for example, in the United States and the United Kingdom. According to Participant KII-PhD-UAR-05, this is occasioned by "the rigid mindsets and [negative] perceptions" of the civil populace toward the military, which make it difficult for many people among the civilians "to appreciate the noble roles of the military, especially, its steady transformation into a people, citizen-friendly and responsive institution" (Participant KII-R-MO-12). This must-have given rise to the contending civilian-military disconnect in Nigeria.

A consensus of thoughts on challenging issues in civilian-military relations and what the media can do to improve it were identified in the interviews. Yeibo (Yeibo, 2020: 23-26) agrees with these findings. Several of the identified challenging issues were traced to the military, civilians and the media as outlined below:

- "inadequate budget allocation and untimely release of allocated budget;"
- "the media most often than not does not hesitate to publish the slightest news about the military, especially if it is negative news;"
- "in some cases, the media publish highly sentimental information to discredit the military in the eyes of Nigerians; in other cases, they could blow minor information out of proportion;"
- "inadequate defence reporting courses for defence correspondence;"
- "disregard for the rule of law and human rights by some members of the armed forces;"
- "wrong perception of the military by some sections of the society;" and
- "the involvement of service personnel in illegal duties."

Furthermore, challenges related to media-military relations may persist because the military and the media interact with information differently. On one hand, the armed forces collect information about the enemy to keep because any piece of information can be a war winner or a lifesaver; hence, the military jealously guards the information it gathers and is not comfortable with the leakage of such information or publication of it in the media. On the other hand, the media hunts for, collect and publish any piece of information that they think will be of interest to the public (also see Mangat, 2018; Musa, 2018; Yeibo, 2020).

4. *Policymaking Influence on Civilian Control of the Military in the Agency Theory Perspective*: From the policymaking perspective, an examination of the emergence of Nigerian armed forces, particularly the Nigerian army, from pre-colonial to colonial times revealed an army marked by tyranny, compulsion, and oppression, all of which served colonial rulers' goals at the time. Sadly, despite living in a democracy, Nigerians' perceptions of the military have not changed (Olofin, 2019; Tar, Sunday, 2017). The public's current impression of the military as government agents having enormous power and authority has remained steady. The sight of soldiers walking through civilian neighbourhoods is alarming (among the audience). Citizens have learned to dread and shun law enforcement authorities, seeing security agents as possible violators of their security rather than suppliers of their own protection, according to the literature (Obarisiagbon, Akintoye, 2019). Unfortunately, some soldiers who are aware of civilian psychology and their fear of the use (or misuse) of force take advantage of this authority to achieve specific goals. This may fall outside the scope of professional advocacy in other situations, such as pockets of alleged civilian rights violations. The acceptance of civilian authority by the military – the idea of civilian control – remains a puzzle piece in Africa's democratisation (Hungnikpo, 2012: 2; Olofin, 2019).

Huntington (Huntington, 2012) refers to the military's ability to submit to complete civilian authority in his historical work *"The Soldier and the State,"* where he explains ideas on civilian-military interactions and military control. The military's primary mission, according to Huntington's idea of objective civilian authority, is to maintain national security without weakening the democratic system of governance in place (Travis, 2017: 2). Huntington's theory, on the other hand, has been widely panned (Tar, Bala, 2021; Travis 2017). Given the fragility of most African governments and the prevalence of military interventions in politics, regardless of these arguments, effective civilian control of the military is a basic principle of civilian-military relations. The military must also understand its role in supporting democracy and be a willing partner in Africa's democratic consolidation (Hungnikpo, 2012: 2).

Recognising civilian control over the military as a fundamental premise of civil-military relations, Feaver (Feavr, 2003) described it in his book as an essential component of democratic administration and an important factor in preventing internal armed conflict (e.g., see Baker, 2007: 114; Olofin, 2019). According to Feaver (Feaver, 2003), without rigorous control over the military and other state security agencies such as the police, the unregulated use of force can, in reality, lead to further security concerns and human rights violations such as we see in Nigeria today. Putting the military under civilian authority and seeking more accountabilities elicits reactions from the military that are often characterised by a "us" versus "them" mentality. In his book, Feaver refers to this as a last resort preference for extreme autonomy, which translates largely as a desire for limited civilian engagement in military issues (Baker, 2007: 124; Feaver, 2003; Olofin, 2019). However, it is vital to note that the need to put the army under civilian control stems from the belief that the army is the state's weapon and an important tool for policymaking. This effectively means that people's views are represented by their elected leaders and that demands for accountability and monitoring are enshrined in law (Babatunde, 2015: 4).

Using master agency theory, Feaver (Feaver, 2003, 1998) emphasises military accountability and civilian control in civilian-military relations. The idea presents a technique for determining civilian influence over the military, as well as measures for resolving the persistent imbalance in the civil-military relationship (Baker, 2007: 126; Tar, Onwurah, 2021). The principal-agency theory and its application to civil-military relations, on the other hand, are only effective as a framework for analysis if the principal authorities (civilians) understand their role and authority over the agent (military) and can control the use of a factor to achieve democratic/noble ideals (Feaver, 2003, 1998). The failure of the master agency theory in Nigeria and Africa is problematic in many ways, especially when compared to mature democracies like the United States and other Western countries, where the military is completely under civilian control (Olofin, 2019).

5. *Solution/The Way Forward*: For the military, the civilians, and the media to achieve a vibrant and secured nation, "the bond of synergy and common heritage between the armed forces, media and the civil populace at large must be perpetually nurtured" (Yeibo, 2020; Oshita, 2019). This is important particularly as the military subordinates itself to democratic power. With synergy between the armed forces, the media and the civil populace, a foundation for peaceful co-existence would be achieved. Therefore, there is the need to dwell on some of the media agenda-setting strategies for improving civilian-military relations and sustaining democratic control of the military in Nigeria. The media must play a positive role in fostering better civilian-military

relations in Nigeria through extensive media campaigns and agenda-setting strategy targeting the government's policy on the institutionalisation of democratic culture and democratic control of the military (Tar, Sunday, 2017). The armed forces would have to reshape their relationship with the media and eschew unnecessary suspicion (see Musa, 2018; Oshita, 2019; Oyewole, 2020). After all, we are now in the 21st century, the information age which the military must take advantage of in line with global best practices and standards if it must remain relevant in the scheme of protecting Nigeria's territorial integrity, safeguarding internal peace, and always sustaining democracy loyalty to civilian authorities (Oyewole, 2020).

4. Results

Media-Military Relations Influence on Democratic Control of the Military: As this study focuses on the media agenda influencing policy agenda of policymakers towards institutionalising true democracy and adopting positive measures to reform the Nigerian armed forces to enhance stronger civilian control of the military, Participant KII-R-MO-03 believes that the "media, despite their challenges were instrumental in returning power to elected civilians in 1999." A few other participants share similar views with that participant as follows: "During the General IBB through to General Abdulsalami regimes, the media played a key role in pressuring the military to hand over power to elected Nigerians and return to the barracks. If not for the media pressure, IBB wouldn't have stepped aside. In fact, he wouldn't have formed an Interim National Government headed by a civilian, Earnest Shonekan to succeed him; if not for the media pressure, General Abdulsalami wouldn't have deemed it appropriate to prepare election and hand over to Obasanjo in 1999..." (Participant KII-PhD-UA-07).

Emphasising the constitutional role of the media for nation-building, Participant KII-S-MEO-01 notes that: "Journalists have a constitutional role to monitor governance and operations of security agencies and therefore, the military should discontinue its old ways of dealing with the media nor should they assume that journalists are their enemies. There is a need to strengthen relations between the military and media, not based on money but based on confidence".

Traditionally, military administrations are associated with coup d'états and countercoups, often which are bloodily fatal, as well as the abuse of human rights and, above all, the suspension of democratic institutions, "...so did the Nigerian media suffer repression and lack of press freedom sometimes. Yet, the media resiliently stood their ground, undaunted, and continued calling for the enthronement of democratic governance in the country, the respect for human rights and press freedom" (Participant KII-S-MEO-09).

"The major complaint against the media is that it compromises national security with its coverage of military activities" (Participant KII-S-MEO-08). Despite the 'cat and mouse' relationship between the media and the military, it is not always bad. "...Fracas often occur between the media and the military when there is a breach of journalistic ethics (on the part of the media) or an excessive application of force extra-judicially on the part of the military. A win-win situation can be created if journalists adhere to journalistic ethics and obey military specifications involving publicity and coverages of news and events. Also, on both parts of the media and the military, including researchers in academia there is the need for a change of the narratives" (Participant KII-R-MO-12).

"Positive media-military relations values should be promoted by the military, the media and the government. For example, billboards, murals, pamphlets can be used to portray media-military relations as well as civilian-military relations in a good light among Nigerians, especially in conflict zones. Such promotional messages as 'the armed forces are your friends', 'the armed forces and media are two sides of the same coin', etc. can be used extensively to change the narrative for the better. With the nearly three decades of military rule, Nigeria must not afford to let negative narratives slip it back to the grip of military juntas as has happened in the Republics of Mali, Guinea Bissau, Burkina Fasso, etc. recently" (Participant KII-PhD-UA-05).

Hence, with a change of the negative narrative regarding the sour relationship between the media and military, a positive atmosphere of collaboration can be created for nation-building and unity. Participant KII-S-NAO-11 agrees, saying: "Nigeria's unity has been kept sacrosanct by the military. I believe, with the ongoing reforms in the military, they're being carried along; they would hardly think of turning against the civilian authorities again. The media keep setting policy agenda for sustained civilian control of the military and enhanced civil-military relations in the country per the African continental as well as a global trend".

Security is of critical importance not only to Nigeria as a nation but also to individuals and groups irrespective of circumstances. On this note, Participant KII-R-MO-03 stresses that, “*Since it is said that ‘survival is the first law of life, it is the responsibility of the media to set agenda for mutual respect through the provision of accurate information to the public and the military’s need to protect sensitive information that borders on national security’.*”

Civilian-Military Relations Influence on Democratic Control of the Military: On a general note, Nigeria, as an emerging democracy with weak political institutions faces challenges relating to systemic stability and continuity, especially given that it has experienced incessant military coups and prolonged military rule. Participant KII-PhD-UA-07 explains that, “*The civil-military relations in Nigeria, an emerging liberal democracy, should be understood within the context of three considerations. One, Nigeria has witnessed periods of military rule as a result of coups and possible civilian governance before focusing on enthroning democratic governance. Consequently, it has tendencies of having weak democratic institutions with elite retired military officials having a strong influence in the political landscape of the country. Two, the emerging democratic institutions that are directly responsible for the control of the military establishment are often fragile due to the relative lack of institutionalization of democratic culture in the polity. Hence, the government devises ways by which to impose its authority on the military establishment. In all these, the use of extensive media agenda-setting narratives is necessary. Three, Nigeria’s transition to democratic governance cannot be understood in isolation, devoid of the globalizing of liberalization of the democracy and the media. Thus, the direct or indirect role of foreign forces as an external variable in pushing for political changes in Nigeria is very important.*”

However, the arena of civilian-military relations in Nigeria, an emerging democracy, differs from what obtains in well-established democracies such as the United States. Hence, Nigeria’s approach to civil control of the military could be unique to it. Nevertheless, civilian-military relations are a critical factor that must be considered when examining civilian control of the military and the sustenance of democracy. “*The processes being utilized for democratic control of the military in Nigeria may neither conform to what obtains in the advanced democracies nor be uniform for all emerging democracies. This has to do with differences in historical experience, the legitimacy of democratic institutions of the state, the role of the military hierarchy, the role of foreign interests in supporting or subverting the emergence of democratic civil-military relations and the prevailing media narratives to some extent*” (Participant KII-R-MO-10).

Challenges of Media-Civilian-Military Relations: Extensive media campaigns can be employed to mend the sour relations” as Participant KII-R-MO-10 put it. According to Participant KII-PhD-UAR-05, this is occasioned by “the rigid mindsets and [negative] perceptions” of the civil populace toward the military, which make it difficult for many people among the civilians “to appreciate the noble roles of the military, especially, its steady transformation into a people, citizen-friendly and responsive institution” (Participant KII-R-MO-12). This must-have given rise to the contending civilian-military disconnect in Nigeria.

5. Conclusion

Since the creation of the Nigerian state 60 years ago, the country has never had an uninterrupted civilian government for two scores and a couple of years until during the Fourth (current) Republic which began in 1999. In other words, this means 22 years of democratic control of the military. Despite the myriad of challenges faced, so much has been achieved in terms of reforming the military institution for democratic consolidation as Nigerians look forward to many, many decades of democratic governance with an institutionalised democratic control of the armed forces. If we consider the scenario that in Africa, since the early 1990s “about half of the civilian governments in the continent had been supplanted by military coups (Musa, 2018: 43) and that since 1945 until 2009, out of the 357 successful coups globally, 82 were in Africa, along with 109 failed attempts and 145 plots that were uncovered before execution (Musa, 2018: 43) but as of 2020, all of Africa practices democracy except for Mali, Guinea Bissau, Burkina Fasso (all in West Africa), Chad (in East Africa), and Sudan (in North Africa) which have had military coup recently.

The notion of civil-military relations has never been more relevant than it is now, given Nigeria’s security concerns and the greater need for the military to acquire civilian trust and collaborate toward a more peaceful state. All the country’s commands and divisions should decentralise and modernise their civilian-military and/or public relations units and desks. Civil-military interactions are necessary not just in times of conflict, but also in times of peace to

maintain and build mutual respect, trust, and improved communication among the public. The benefits of partnership with civil security agencies, particularly the Nigeria Police Force and the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, must be aggressively recognised by the modern civil-military relations. Nigeria's whole security architecture has been deprived of much-needed intelligence for sharing information and avoiding potential threats for a long time due to inter-agency rivalry and dominance.

To achieve meaningful civilian-military relations and institutionalised democratic control of the military, it is imperative to have a holistic change of the negative narratives that are making rounds in society depicting sour civilian-military relations and denoting the Nigerian military as waiting in ambush for any slight opportunity to seize power from the democratically elected government. Several ways of achieving this may be available. However, a comprehensive media agenda-setting strategy that will incorporate (i) setting an agenda to influence policy on the institutionalisation of democratic control of the military, (ii) setting an agenda to educate the public and policymakers and influence public opinion regarding healthy civilian-military relations and democratic control of the military for sustained democracy, and (iii) media setting an agenda to influence other media's narratives. An extensive media education and agenda-setting campaign must be strategically planned, designed, and implemented for over a very long time. Social media platforms must be accommodated as well.

Because of the discourse above and the reviewed literature in the preceding sections, this study found that media education and agenda-setting roles have been instrumental in: (i) the steady democratic control of the military in Nigeria, with prospects of it becoming substantially if not fully institutionalised within the next two decades; (ii) the substantial democratic control of the military in Nigeria, which although has greatly improved, still needs further enhancement. The study also found that some of (iii) the toughest challenges to the institutionalisation of democratic control of the military in Nigeria would be the 'politicised' disunity on ethnoreligious lines, institutionalised corruption, and highly commercialised media industry.

This strongly suggests that politicised ethnoreligious disunity can set a colossal cleavage in the military institution along ethnic and religious divides and erode it of loyalty to the state; institutionalised corruption can create institutionalised nepotism and obliterate fairness and equity within the military institution; these, in turn, can lead to mutiny and systemic chaos in the military establishment; a highly commercialised media industry in an emerging democracy like Nigeria could be detrimental to healthy civilian-military relations and democratic control of the military by the civilian authority because highly profit-oriented media focus on profit-making at all costs (for example, by paying attention to 'yellow politics' or sycophantic politics and adverts rather than setting agendas to influence democratic-oriented national development policies such as the enhancement of civilian-military relations and institutionalisation of democratic control of the military for sustained democracy. Moreover, with the semi-autonomous National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and Nigerian Press Council (NPC) in charge of media and press regulations, ensuring effective regulation of the nation's broadcast and print media content for nation-building is progressively becoming unrealistic (see [Yusuf et al., 2020](#)).

Taking on the agenda-setting theoretical perspective, this paper proposes the following hypothetical propositions for future research to test: (1) a sustained, strategically planned and implemented media narrative agenda-setting campaign can influence media issue salience; (2) a sustained, strategically planned and implemented media narrative agenda-setting campaign can influence public opinion regarding the institutionalisation of a democratic culture; and (3) a sustained, strategically planned and implemented media narrative agenda-setting campaign can influence policy on the institutionalisation of democratic control of the military.

Finally, to borrow Yeibo ([Yeibo, 2020](#)) and Musa's ([Musa, 2018](#)) words, it is recommended that the military should use the challenging issues in the media-civilian-military relations to serve as a template at all levels in drawing up appropriate standard operating procedure. Also, the military should collaborate with the media to set an agenda for healthy civilian-military relations, for example, through mass enlightenment for both the political and military spheres. The political leaders require some element of exposure on military-related issues while the military personnel need to be educated on civil norms and processes to keep all abreast within the constitutional limits as provided by the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

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