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### Research Article

## Assessing The Influence of Media Ownership on Journalism Practice: A Case Study of ZNBC TV1 and ZNBC Radio 1

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### About Article

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### ABSTRACT

Media play an important role of informing, entertaining and educating society. Its significance and influence whether electronic or print media plays an undeniable role in today's world. However, the effects of media ownership on journalism quality have been highly debated globally and various media studies have proven that media ownership does affect how media practitioners cover stories. It is in this context, this study investigates the influence of media ownership on journalism practice at Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC) TV1 and Radio 1. Employing a mixed-method approach with 50 respondents, the research reveals that media ownership exerts significant influence on editorial decisions, resulting in instances of editorial bias, self-censorship, and prioritization of news items that align with government interests. The study's findings underscore the need for policies that protect editorial independence in public media, ensuring that journalists can operate without undue influence. By shedding light on the mechanisms of media ownership's influence, this research contributes to ongoing conversations about media freedom, democratic governance, and the role of public broadcasters in Zambia. The study's insights have implications for promoting journalistic independence, integrity, and quality reporting, ultimately supporting the development of a more robust and democratic media landscape.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background

The history of media spans thousands of years, beginning with oral storytelling and written records (Innis, 1950). The 15th-century invention of the printing press drastically enhanced knowledge dissemination through mass-produced printed materials (Eisenstein, 1979). The advent of newspapers in the 17th and 18th centuries further broadened media's reach by facilitating news, opinion, and debate (Williams, 1974). By the 20th century, electronic media such as radio and television transformed information and entertainment consumption (Castells, 2001). Today, media's role as an informant, entertainer, and educator is paramount (Herman & Chomsky, 1988), functioning as the "fourth estate" in democracies to hold power accountable and empower citizens (Buckley *et al.*, 2011). Jenkins (2022) notes the media's role as a critical bridge between the public and world events, especially during crises.

Despite its significance, media faces criticism for failing in its journalistic duties, with ownership dynamics often undermining its effectiveness in serving public interests (McChesney, 2008). According to Coronel (2013), obstacles such as owner interference and oppressive legislation compromise journalistic principles like fairness and objectivity. Noam (2009) stresses how media ownership influences editorial policies and content, while Picard (2014) categorizes media ownership into state, private, and community types. State ownership may diminish editorial independence (Curran & Seaton, 2010), while private ownership varies from small to large enterprises (McQuail, 2010). Community media, as defined by Fellermann (2015), consists of independent, non-profit outlets.

In China, the CCP's tight control leads to self-censorship among journalists (Zhao, 2008), framing media as a state propaganda tool rather than a facilitator of independent discourse. Similarly, in Russia, under President Putin, journalists face threats when covering sensitive topics, reflecting state control's damaging effect on journalistic freedom (Golosov, 2016; Mikhalev, 2018). In contrast, Finland has successfully implemented regulations to safeguard media independence and pluralism (Bergenstråhle, 2018).

In Zambia, the state-owned Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC) significantly influences the media landscape. Concerns about its editorial autonomy date back to its origins during colonial rule, which prioritized colonial interests (Chilisa, 2014). Following independence in 1964, ZNBC was shaped by a socialist agenda (Mwakikagile, 2010). The late 1990s ushered in media privatization, leading to a more diverse media environment (Chibwana, 2009), yet ZNBC faced ongoing political interference that compromised its journalistic integrity (Mudenda, 2015; Matibini, 2006). This political influence persisted, resulting in biased reporting that aligns with ruling party interests, undermining ZNBC's efficacy as a watchdog (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Therefore, evaluating ZNBC's ownership structure is crucial for understanding its impacts on journalism practices in Zambia, as ownership can significantly influence the objectivity and ethics of reporting.

### 1.2. Statement of the problem

Zambia's progress in media freedom has been undermined

by persistent government interference, which compromises editorial independence and erodes public trust in the media. As a primary public broadcaster, the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC) has a mandate to provide impartial, diverse, and balanced information. However, its history of operating under political influence has shaped its editorial decisions, raising concerns about the extent of governmental control. Despite a partially enabled legal environment, ZNBC's culture of favoring ruling elites persists, leading to biased reporting and suppression of critical voices (Matibini, 2006; Hamasaka, 2008). This study investigates how media ownership's influence on ZNBC's journalistic practices affects its ability to provide unbiased and accurate information, ultimately impacting its role as a democratic watchdog.

### 1.3. General objective

To assess the influence of media ownership on journalism practice.

Specific objectives

- i. To investigate if there is media ownership influence on editorial content
- ii. To ascertain to what extent media ownership influences editorial content
- iii. To establish reasons for media ownership influence on editorial content

### 1.4. Research questions

- i. Is there media ownership influence on editorial content?
- ii. To what extent does media ownership influence editorial content?
- iii. What are the reasons contributing to media ownership influence on editorial content?

### 1.5. Theoretical framework

This study is anchored in the Agenda Setting Theory which postulates that the media has the power to influence and shape the public perception of important issues by selectively emphasizing certain topics, stories or issues over others, thereby influencing public opinion (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). According to the authors, media outlets with strong political or economic ties will prioritize stories that align with their interests, potentially sidelining topics that may be critical of government or other powerful sectors. In the context of media ownership, the Agenda-Setting Theory helps unpack how owners, who control the media outlets, can influence the topics that receive attention, the angles from which they are covered, and the frequency of their coverage. As owners exercise control over editorial priorities, they can effectively set the agenda, determining which issues reach audiences and which are overlooked or downplayed.

The Agenda-Setting Theory is particularly relevant for understanding the influence of media ownership on journalism practice because it highlights the potential for owners to manipulate not only what stories are covered but how they are presented. In cases where owners wield significant influence over editorial content, journalists may find themselves guided by implicit or explicit directives that prioritize the owners' interests, leading to a shift in what is covered and in the



framing of coverage. Scholars such as Entman (2007) assert that owners can leverage this power to promote content that benefits them, turning news outlets into platforms that reflect owners' priorities rather than acting as independent conveyors of information. This theory allows researchers to assess the extent to which owners' priorities affect not only what is reported but also the angles and narratives attached to stories, thus impacting journalistic integrity.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Media ownership influence on editorial content

The influence of media ownership on editorial content has been widely examined in the UK, China, Zimbabwe, and Zambia, revealing varying degrees of impact across these countries. Curran and Seaton (1997) note that media owners in the UK, such as Rupert Murdoch and Robert Maxwell, often direct their publications to serve specific political or commercial interests rather than objective journalism (Doyle, 2002). This influence manifests both directly, through editorial decisions, and indirectly, by fostering a culture of compliance, self-censorship, and selective personnel appointments (Okech, 2009; Doyle, 2002). Murdoch's News Corp exemplifies this pattern by shaping newspaper editorial stances to align with his political preferences (Freedman, 2014; Greenslade, 2004). The BBC, while publicly funded and theoretically accountable to the public, also faces constraints from its funding model, which creates pressures that can influence editorial independence (Schlosberg & O'Neill, 2010; Williams, 2014). In contrast, media ownership in authoritarian regimes like China significantly narrows editorial freedom, with the state-controlled media, such as CCTV and the People's Daily, propagating narratives that support the Chinese Communist Party (Zhao, 2008; Stockmann & Gallagher, 2011). This bias is evident during significant events, wherein opposing views are often marginalized (Xu & Albert, 2021; Han & Zhao, 2017). The CCP's stringent control over the media limits public discourse and acts as a barrier to critical analysis of government actions (Stockmann, 2013; Qiang, 2011).

Similar trends are observed in Zimbabwe, where government ownership and legislation, like the Patriot Bill, stifle media independence and foster self-censorship among journalists (Ndoya & Moyo-Nyede, 2023; Reporters Without Borders, 2023). State-controlled outlets, like the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation, exhibit significant bias in favor of the ruling party, compromising the media's role as a watchdog (Moyo, 2009; Chuma, 2011). Despite claims of media freedom improvements, oppressive laws and policies continue to restrict press liberty and diminish critical journalistic endeavors. In Zambia, public media, exemplified by ZNBC and Zambia Daily Mail, often reflects pro-government narratives and neglects critical reporting, particularly regarding economic issues (Sichinga, 2019; MISA Zambia, 2017). Contrastingly, private media like News Diggers provide more balanced critiques, showcasing the critical role of ownership in shaping editorial direction (Entman, 2006). Research indicates state-controlled media such as ZNBC exhibit significant bias favoring the ruling party, particularly during elections, subsequently limiting opposition perspectives (Mabweazara, 2022; Banda, 2017). Ultimately,

across these contexts, media ownership fundamentally shapes editorial content, often leading to censorship, reduced diversity of viewpoints, and an erosion of democratic accountability (Freedom House, 2011; Media Institute of Southern Africa, 2019). The constraints imposed by governmental control and ownership structures consistently undermine the media's ability to perform its essential roles in society.

### 2.2. Extent to which media ownership influences editorial content

The extent of media ownership influence on editorial content is substantial in authoritarian regimes like Russia and North Korea. In Russia, the government exerts significant control over media outlets, suppressing criticism and promoting state ideologies (Vartanova, 2018). The ownership structure, tightly controlled by the government, influences all aspects of editorial content (Petrov, 2017). Russia's media freedom ranking is among the lowest globally, with experts likening it to the Soviet era (Freedom House, 2020). Similarly in North Korea, media ownership influence on editorial content is absolute. The ruling Korean Workers' Party (KWP) monopolizes all public communications, ensuring that editorial independence is non-existent (Chou, 2019). The state-run Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) is the country's main news source, disseminating reports that align with state ideology (Kim & Park, 2020). The degree of control on editorial content in North Korea is extremely high, with no room for dissent or alternative perspectives (McEachern, 2019). This is also consistent with studies in Zambia. According to Mwewa (2018), the degree of influence exerted on media content at ZNBC is substantial, with quantitative studies revealing alarming statistics of about 70-80% of editorial content being influenced by government interests. Additionally, 60% of journalists face pressure to alter content (Kang'amba, 2020). Government interference affects 40% of public media content (Banda, 2013). Weak media regulations, lack of journalist autonomy, and economic dependence on owners contribute to ownership control (Banda, 2013; Kang'amba, 2020; Mwewa, 2018). The extent of government influence over ZNBC lies in its ownership structure, which is reinforced by policies governing broadcasting in Zambia (Chirwa, 2019). The government's financial support and legislative control create a situation where ZNBC's independence is severely compromised (Hafkin, 2020). This control can extend to the selection of news items, framing of stories, and overall tone of content presented to the public. The government's ability to appoint the Board of Directors and senior management at ZNBC ensures that the broadcaster remains closely aligned with state objectives (Chirwa, 2019). Studies have shown that the government exerts influence over ZNBC through strategic appointments, editorial guidelines, and self-censorship (Mwansa, 2021; Sikaonga, 2018; Kalinda, 2019). The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Services plays a central role in ensuring that ZNBC aligns with government interests (Sikaonga, 2018). Journalists and editors at ZNBC often report receiving direct editorial guidelines from ministry officials, which specify the angle that news stories should take. These directives are not merely suggestions but are seen as binding instructions, and failing to adhere to them can result in professional repercussions.



### 2.3. Reasons for media ownership influence on editorial content

The influence of media ownership on editorial content is heavily documented across various contexts, with governments utilizing control over media primarily to maintain power and shape public perception. Chang (2013) notes that media ownership serves as a strategic resource for political elites, allowing them to suppress dissent and promote favorable narratives. This is evident in Turkey, where media outlets align with government interests, particularly during election periods, as indicated by Somer (2019) and Yörük (2011). Özdemir (2020) highlights how owners often exercise self-censorship to secure political advantages, while Akser and Baybars-Hawks (2012) point to state funding's role in reinforcing this dynamic by positioning public broadcasters, like TRT, under government influence. The Turkish government's control over media is also justified by national security concerns, as Omer (2021) and Özkan (2019) note. This control often extends to framing military operations as necessary for safeguarding the nation, thereby delegitimizing opposition voices. Similarly, in Iran, state media acts as a vehicle to promote the government's ideological agendas, with Bakhash (2006) and Mohammadi (2018) showing how media narratives emphasize national pride while restricting dissenting viewpoints. In the African context, particularly Uganda, government control over media content has been linked to political stability and regime preservation. The Ugandan government employs restrictive laws, such as the Public Order Management Act (POMA), to suppress opposition narratives during elections (Gibb, 2019). National security threats are leveraged to justify control, leading to limited public awareness of critical issues (Bakayana, 2020). In Zambia, the historical context of media ownership under former President Kaunda set a precedent for governmental interference, with recent patterns showing a continuation of political censorship (Zambia Press Forum, 2007; Civicus, 2017). Research indicates that political affiliations of media owners often skew editorial content, compromising journalistic objectivity (Jere, 2018). Mbewe (2022) and Chavula (2019) affirm that profit-driven motives increasingly lead to sensationalism, detracting from informative reporting. The phenomenon of self-censorship among journalists, as discussed by Nyamnjoh (2005) and Banda (2008), heavily undermines the media's role as an independent watchdog. This trend is prevalent across media platforms, limiting critical discourse and ensuring that only government-aligned narratives are reported (Chilongoshi & Mulenga, 2018). Overall, the influence of media ownership on editorial content across countries illustrates a broader narrative of how governments utilize media control to maintain authority, manipulate public discourse, and suppress dissenting voices.

In conclusion, the reviewed literature highlights the pervasive influence of media ownership on editorial content across various contexts, with governments often utilizing control to maintain power and shape public perception. While studies have extensively examined the impact of media ownership in different regions, including the UK, China, Zimbabwe, and Zambia, a notable research gap exists in understanding the nuanced dynamics of media ownership influence on public broadcasters in Zambia, particularly ZNBC. This study aims to address this gap by investigating the specific mechanisms of media ownership

influence on ZNBC's journalistic practices and its implications for democratic governance and media freedom in Zambia.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

According to Creswell (2014), a research design serves as a blueprint or strategy for conducting a study, encompassing the sampling strategy, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques. It outlines the logical steps that a researcher follows to answer research questions or test hypotheses (Shadish *et al.*, 2002). This study employed a case study research design, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches to comprehensively analyze the influence of media ownership on journalism practices at Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC). The target population consisted of 50 research participants—25 staff members from ZNBC TV1 and 25 from ZNBC Radio One—selected using purposive sampling to incorporate diverse perspectives from various departments. This sample size and composition allowed for sufficient depth of information and representation of insights from news anchors, reporters, news editors, producers, and presenters.

The sampling rationale was based on the need to capture the experiences and perceptions of journalists and media professionals directly involved in or knowledgeable about journalism and media ownership at ZNBC. Purposive sampling ensured that participants were information-rich cases relevant to the study (Creswell, 2014).

To ensure data reliability and validity, the study employed triangulation by integrating multiple data sources and methods. Primary data collection involved self-administered survey questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, while secondary data was sourced from academic journals, textbooks, and online resources. The combination of questionnaires and interviews allowed for both quantitative and qualitative data collection, providing a comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

Data analysis triangulation was achieved using various analytical tools, such as Excel and STATA, to validate findings and ensure consistency. Additionally, the study adhered to ethical standards, including informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity, to protect participants' rights and promote honest responses.

The study's findings are generalizable to the extent that they provide insights into the dynamics of media ownership influence on public broadcasters in similar contexts. However, the case study design and sampling strategy limit the generalizability of findings to other contexts or populations.

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1. Presentation of research findings

**Table 1.** Age of respondents

Age of respondent	Frequency	Percentage
20-30	12	24%
31-40	24	48%
41-50	14	28%
Total	50	100%





The table above illustrates the age distribution of respondents. According to the results obtained, 48% of the respondents were between the ages of 31-40 years, 28% were between the ages of 41-50, while 24% of the respondents were between the ages of 20-30.

**Table 2.** Sex of the respondents

Sex of the respondent	Frequency	Percentage
Female	24	48%
Male	26	52%
Total	50	100%

Table 2 illustrates the gender of the respondents. As can be seen from the above data, 52% of the respondents were male while 48% were females.

**Table 3.** Highest level of education

Sex of the respondent	Frequency	Percentage
Female	24	48%
Male	26	52%
Total	50	100%

Table 3 illustrates the highest level of education of the respondents. According to the data, 100% of the respondents attained a tertiary education.

**Table 4.** Name of media institution

Name of media institution	Frequency	Percentage
ZNBC Radio One	25	50%
ZNBC Tv1	25	50%
Total	50	100%

The table illustrated above presents the name of the media institutions where the respondents were drawn. According to the data above, 50% of the respondents were from ZNBC radio 1 and 50% where from ZNBC TV1.

**Table 5.** Job position/title

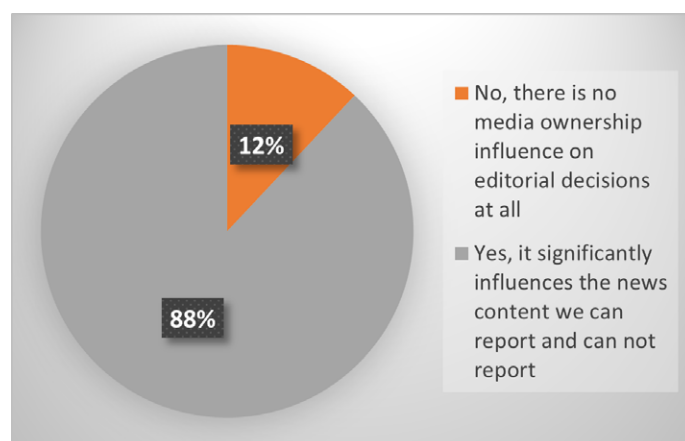
Job title/position	Frequency	Percentage
News anchor	14	28%
News Editor	2	4%
Presenter	17	34%
Producer	3	6%
Reporter	14	28%
Total	50	100%

Table 5 presents the various positions of different respondents. The data indicates that 34% of the respondents were presenters, 28% of the respondents were reporters, and another 28% were news anchors while 6% were producers and 4% were news editors.

**Table 6.** Years of experience at media organization

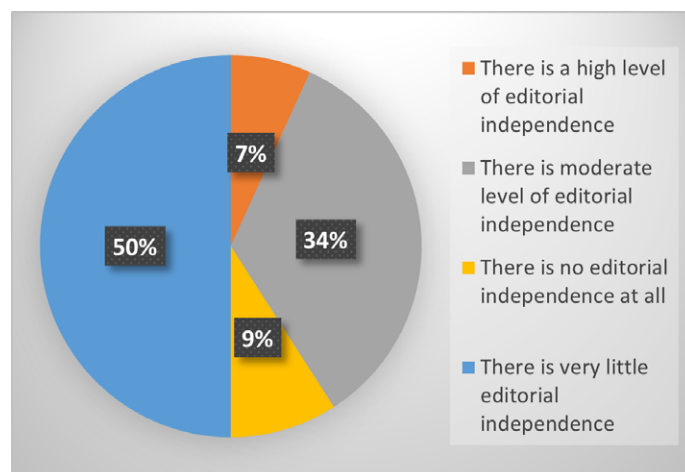
Years of experience at media organization	Frequency	Percentage
11-20 years	9	18%
5-10 years	19	38%
Less than 5 years	16	32%
over 20 years	12	12%
Total	50	100%

Table 6 illustrates the years of experience of the respondents. The data indicates that 38% had between 5 and 10 years of experience, 32% had less than 5 years of experience, 18% had between 11 and 20 years while 12% of the respondents had at least over 20 years of experience.



**Figure 1.** Media ownership influencing editorial decisions

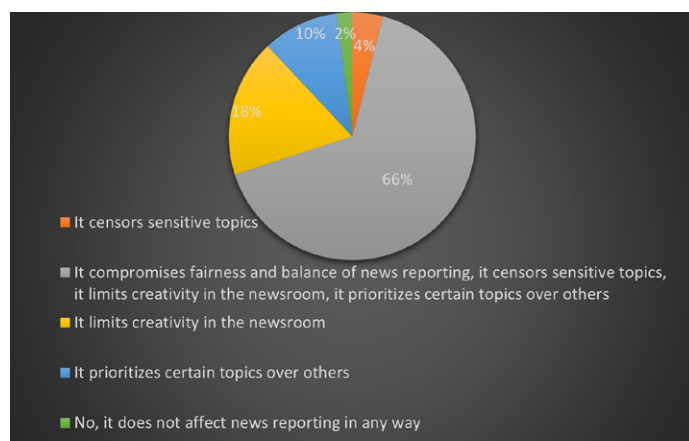
The pie chart above illustrates the respondent's views when asked if they believe media ownership influences editorial decisions at their media institution. According to the data above, 88% of the respondents answered yes, it significantly influences the news content they can report and cannot report, while 12% answered no, there is no media influence on editorial decisions at all.



**Figure 2.** Editorial independence

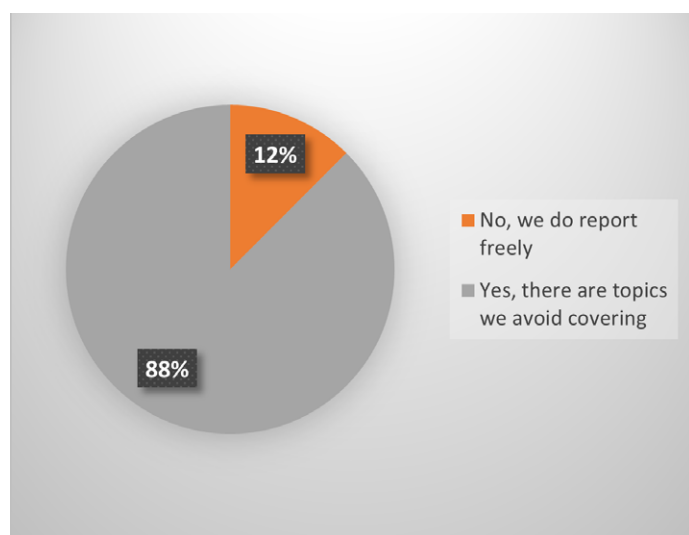


The pie chart above explains the various views of the respondents when asked how they would rate the editorial independence at their institution. 50% of the respondents answered there is very little editorial independence, 34% percent responded there is moderate level of editorial independence, while 9% said there is no editorial independence at all and 7% said there is a high level of independence.



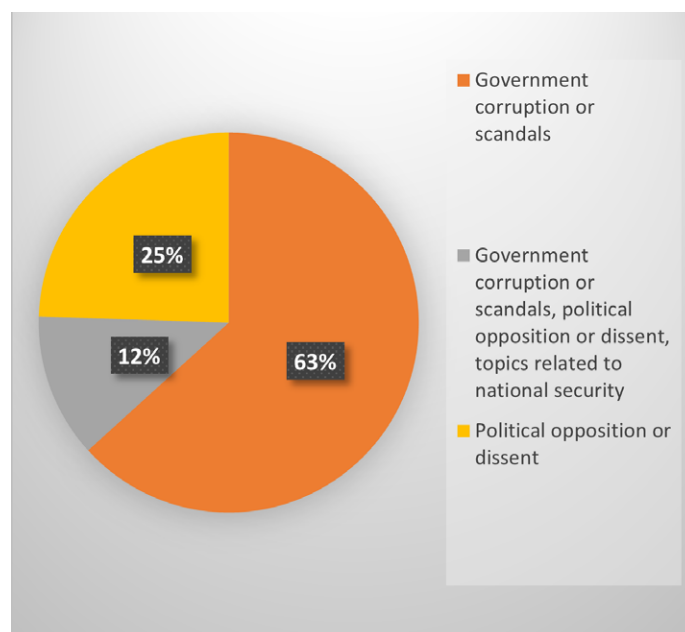
**Figure 3.** Media ownership affecting news reporting

The pie chart illustrates the various responses of respondents when asked how media ownership affects news reporting. 66% of the respondents ticked all four boxes saying: it compromises fairness and balance of news reporting, it censors sensitive topics, it limits creativity in the newsroom and it prioritizes certain topics over others. 18% said it limits creativity in the newsroom, 10% said it prioritizes certain topics over others, while 4% said that it censors sensitive topics and 4% said no, it does not affect news reporting in any way.



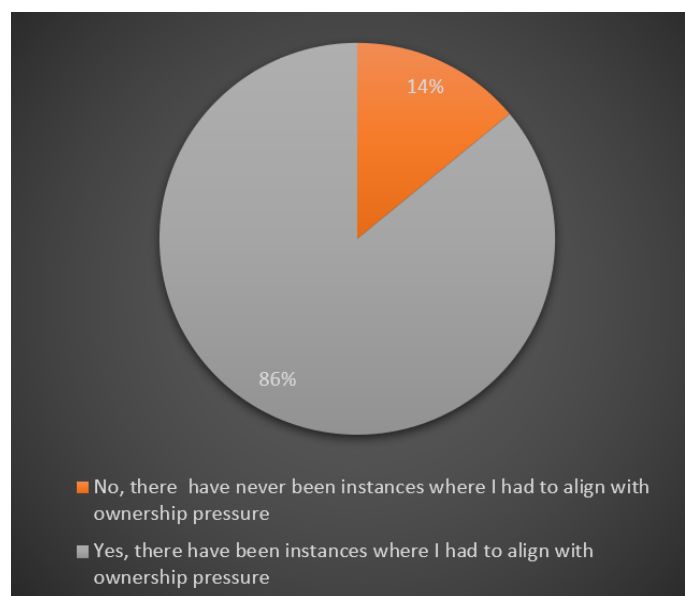
**Figure 4.** Fear in coverage of certain topics

Figure 4 highlights the percentages of the respondents when asked if they do fear covering certain topics due to their repercussions. 88% of the of the respondents said yes, there are topics we are avoid covering while 12% answered no, we do report freely.



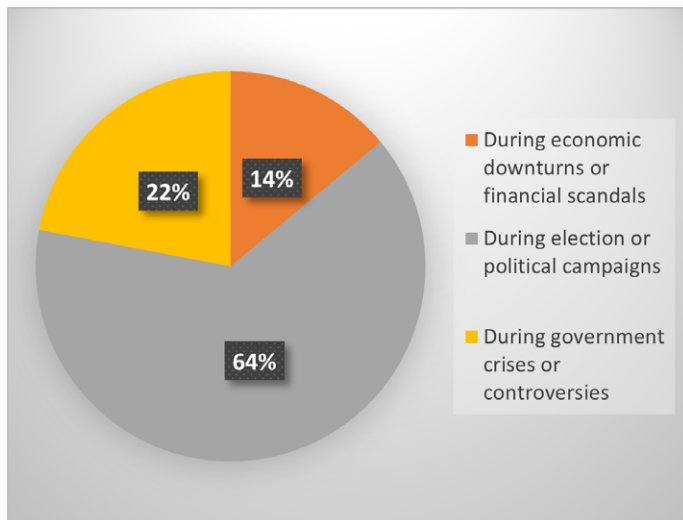
**Figure 5.** Topics avoided

Figure 5 shows the respondents view when asked what topics they avoid covering due to their repercussions. According to the data above, 63% of the respondents answered they avoid government corruption and scandals. 25% answered political opposition or dissent while 12% answered government corruption or scandals, political opposition or dissent, and topics related to national security



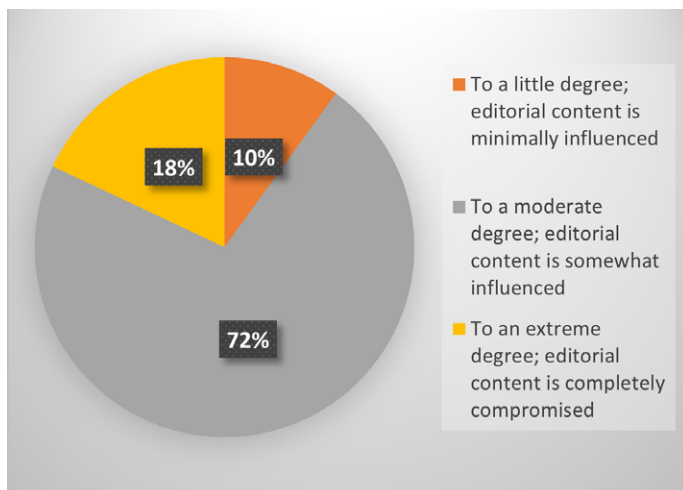
**Figure 6.** Aligning with ownership pressure

The pie chart above describes the respondent's views when asked if they have ever encountered instances where they had to align with ownership pressure. 86% of the respondents answered yes, there have been instances where I had to align with ownership pressure while 14% said no, there have never been instances where I had to align with ownership pressure.



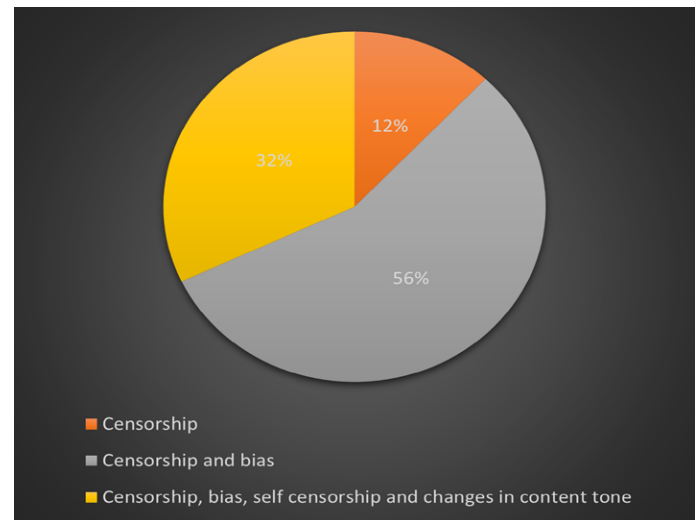
**Figure 7.** Instances of ownership pressure

The pie chart shows the responses of the participants when asked where they encountered instances of ownership pressure. 64% of the respondents said during election or political campaigns, 22% said during government crisis or controversies while 14% said during economic downturns or financial scandals.



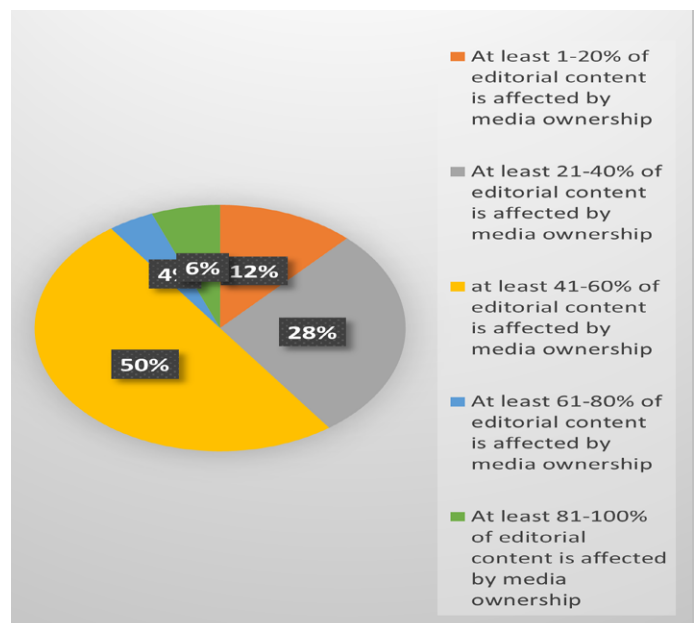
**Figure 8.** Degree of media ownership influence

Figure 8 illustrates the respondents view of the degree to which media ownership influences editorial content. According to the data above, 72% of the respondents said to a moderate degree; editorial content is somewhat influenced. 18% said to an extreme degree; editorial content is completely compromised and 10% said to a little degree; editorial content is minimally influenced.



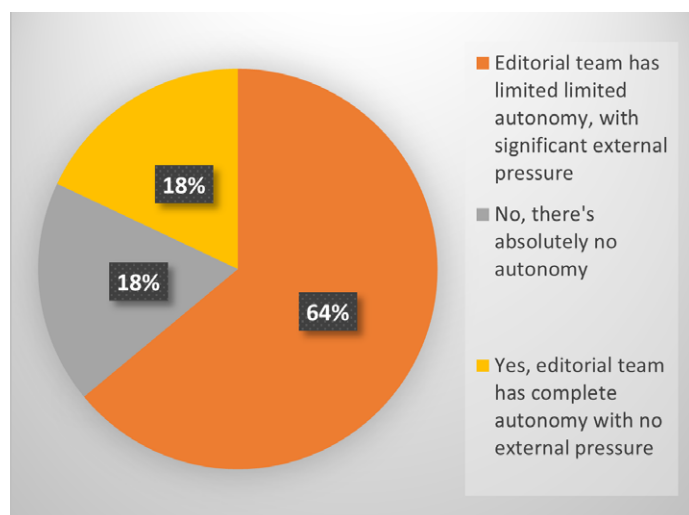
**Figure 9.** Media ownership influence manifestation in editorial content

Figure 9 describes how the degree of media ownership influence manifests in editorial content. According to the data, 56% indicated it's through censorship and bias only, 32% indicated it's through censorship, bias, self-censorship and changes in content tone and 12% of the respondents indicated it's through censorship.



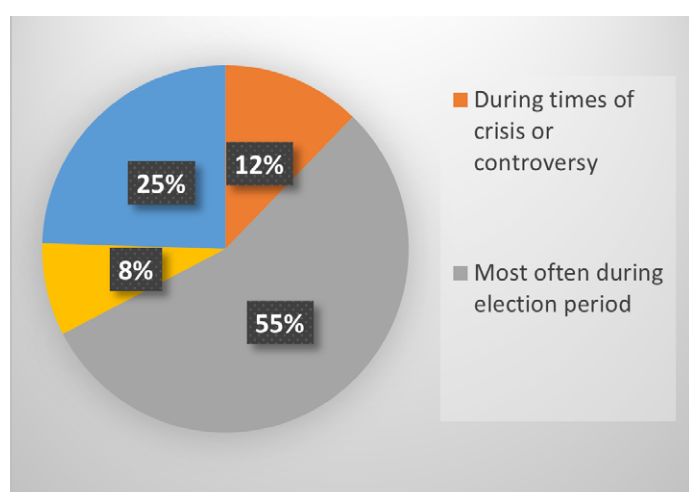
**Figure 10.** proportion of content influenced

The pie chart indicates the proportion of editorial content influenced. 50% of the respondents believe at least 41-60% proportion of editorial content influenced by media ownership, 28% believe it is at least 21-40%, 12% of the respondents think it is at least 1-20% while 6% think it is at least 81-100% and 4% believe at least 61-40% of editorial content is affected by media ownership.



**Figure 11.** Autonomy in selecting topics

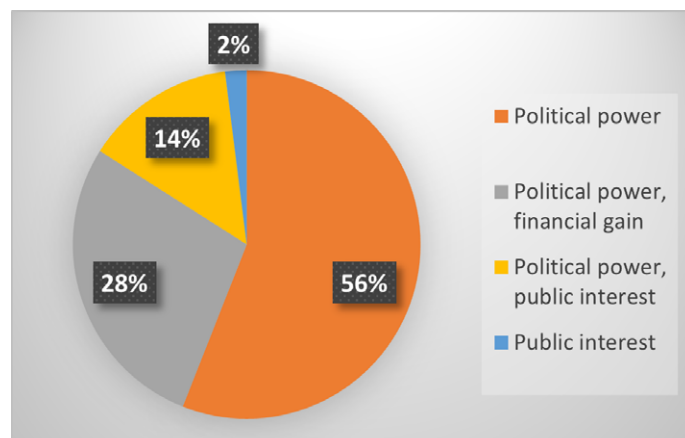
The pie chart above illustrates the responses by respondents to the question, 'Do you think that the editorial team has autonomy in selecting news topics despite ownership?' According to the data obtained, 64% of the respondents answered editorial team has limited autonomy, with significant external pressure. 18% of the respondents answered yes, editorial team had complete autonomy with no external pressure where as another 18% of the respondents answered no, there is absolutely no autonomy in selecting news topics.



**Figure 12.** frequency of pressure

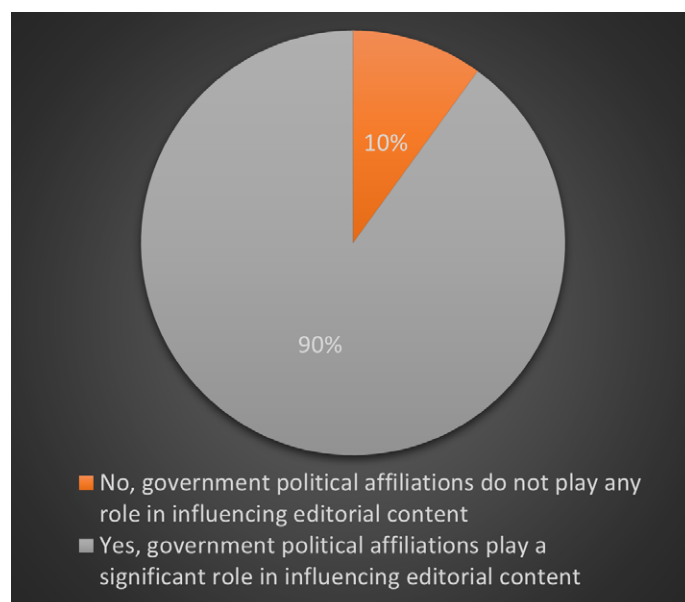
The pie chart reveals the percentages of how often respondents feel pressured to align with specific narratives. 55% of the respondents said it's most often during election

period, 25% of the respondents said regularly, to promote specific ideologies, while 12% of the respondents said during times of crisis or controversy and 8% of the government said ownership never pressures journalist to align with specific narratives.



**Figure 13.** Factors leading to editorial influence

The pie chart reveals the contributing factors leading to the influence of media ownership on editorial content. According to the data, 56% of the respondents answered political power is a factor contributing to media ownership influence on editorial content, 28% of the respondents said, political power and financial gain while 14% said political power and public interest and 2% said public interest alone is a factor contributing to the media ownership influence on editorial content.



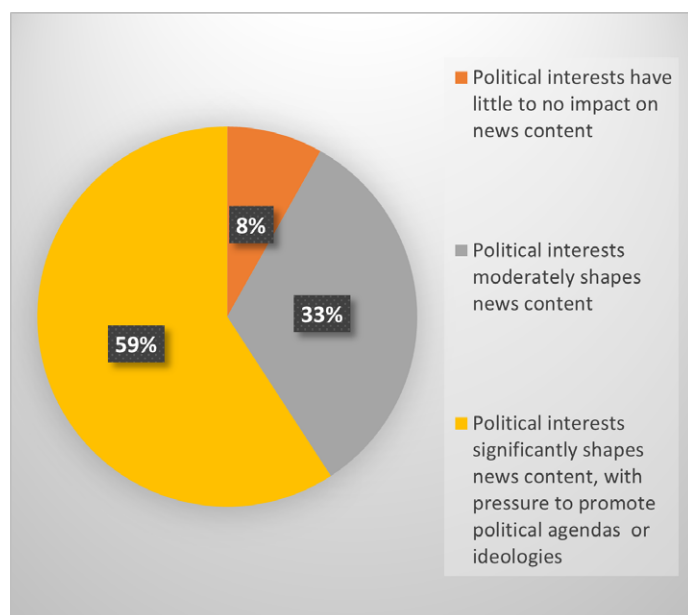
**Figure 14.** Government political affiliations role on content

The pie chart shows the respondents view to 'Do government political affiliations play a role in influencing editorial content' 90% of the respondents answered yes, government political affiliations play a significant role in influencing editorial content while 10% of the respondents answered no, government



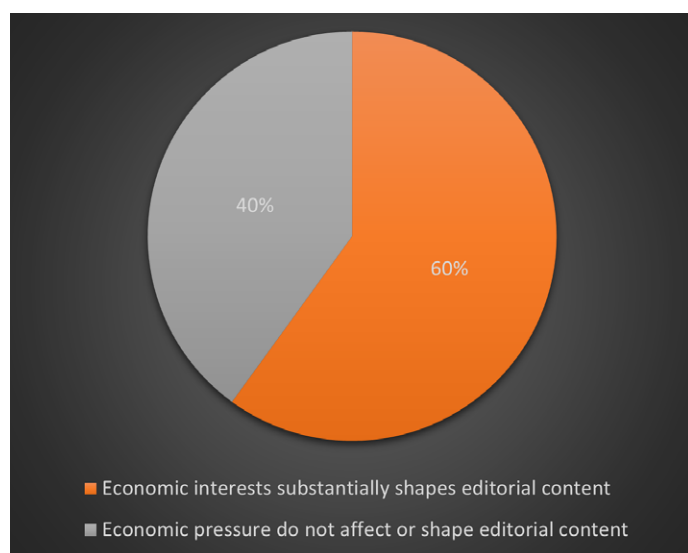


political affiliations do not play any role in influencing editorial content.



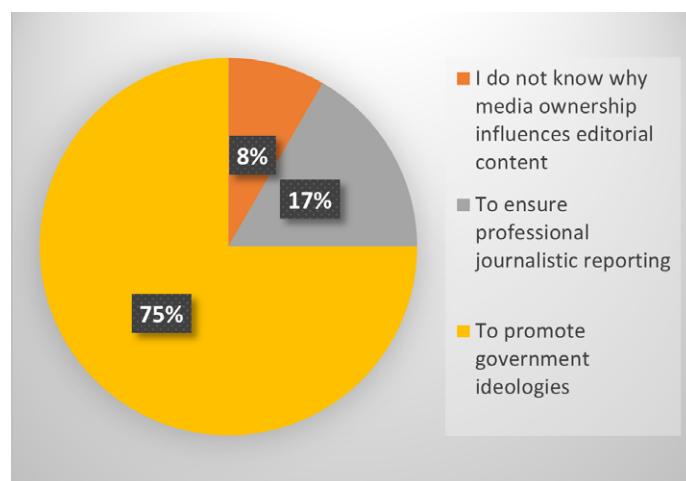
**Figure 15.** Rating political interest's impact

Respondents were asked if they answered yes to the previous question, how would you rate the impact of political interests on news content at their institution. According to the data illustrated in figure 4.2, 59% of the respondents answered political interests significantly shapes content with pressure to promote political agendas or ideologies, while 33% of the respondents answered political interests moderately shapes news content and 8% of the respondents answered political interests have little to no impact on news content.



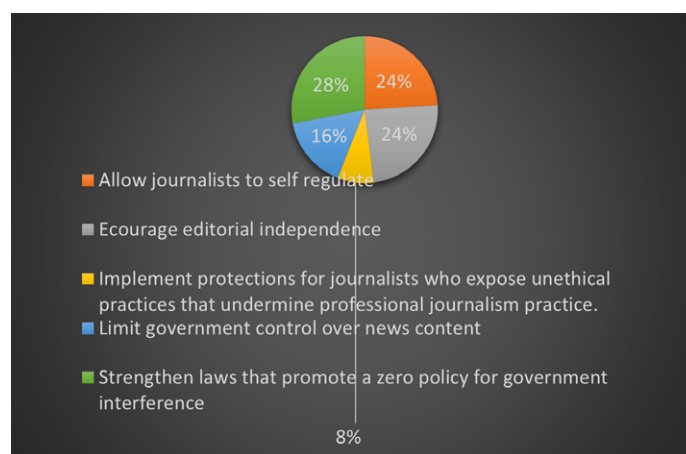
**Figure 16.** Economic interests influence

Figure 16 shows the responses of respondents to 'Do economic interests influence editorial content' according to the data obtained, 60% of the respondent's economic interests substantially shapes editorial content while 40% answers economic interests do not affect or shape editorial content.



**Figure 17.** Why media ownership influences content

The pie chart describes the responses of the participants in response to in 'in your opinion, why do you think media ownership influences editorial content. According to the data in figure 4.4, 75% of the respondents said to promote government ideologies, 17% of the respondents said to ensure professional journalistic reporting and 8% of the respondents said I do not know why media ownership influences editorial content.



**Figure 18.** Steps to mitigate ownership

The pie chart illustrates the responses of the steps that can be done to mitigate media ownership influence on journalism practice. According to the data obtained, 28% of the respondents suggest to strengthen laws that promotes a zero policy for government interference. 24% suggest to allow journalists to self regulate. Another 24% suggest to encourage editorial independence while 16% suggest to limit government control over news content and 8% suggest to implement protections for journalists who expose unethical practices that undermine professional journalism practice.

## 4.2. Discussions

### 4.2.1. Demographics

The demographic characteristics of the respondents provides significant insights into the composition of the sample. As such, the study began by requesting the background of the



demographic starting with age, then sex of the respondents, highest level of education, name of the media organization they work for, current job title/position and years of experience at their media organization. Notably, the age distribution of the respondent reveals a percentage of individuals in the 31-40 age bracket (48%), followed by those in the 41-50 age bracket (28%), and a smaller proportion in the 20-30 age bracket (24%). This age distribution suggests that the sample is predominantly comprised of middle-aged individuals. However, the differences in age suggests a good mix, which certainly provides a broader range of perspectives and experiences. Furthermore, the gender distribution indicates a near-equal split between males (52%) and females (48%), which suggests a relatively balanced representation of both genders. The educational background of the respondents reveals a uniform attainment of tertiary education, indicating a high level of educational achievement among the sample. The media institutions represented in the study are exclusively ZNBC Radio 1 and ZNBC TV1, with an equal split between the two (50% each). The job title/position distribution of the respondents is very crucial as it reveals a diverse range of roles as well as the diversity of perspectives and experiences within the media institution, with presenters (34%), reporters (28%), and news anchors (28%) being the most common, while producers (6%) and news editors (4%) are less represented. Finally, the years of experience depicted indicate a range of experience levels, with 38% of respondents having 5-10 years of experience, 32% having less than 5 years, 18% having 11-20 years, and 12% having over 20 years of experience. This distribution is very important because it highlights the presence of both seasoned professionals and newer entrants in the media field which adds valuable insights to the study.

#### Media ownership impact on editorial content

The findings reveal evidence of the significant influence of media ownership on editorial decisions and journalistic practice. A substantial majority (78%) of respondents believe that media ownership significantly influences the news report they can report and can not report. However, this finding raises concerns about the potential for self-censorship and the erosion of journalistic autonomy. Furthermore, the perception reflected in the respondent's assessment of editorial independence, with 50% indicating that there is very little editorial independence, 34% reporting a moderate level, 9% stating that there is no editorial independence at all, and 7% citing a high level of independence. The high percentage of respondents reporting little to no editorial independence is alarming and suggests that media ownership may be exerting undue influence over the content of news reporting. However, the fact that 7% of respondents report high levels of editorial independence suggests that some media practitioners may be successfully resisting ownership pressure. The data also reveals that media ownership affects news reporting in various ways, including censoring sensitive topics, limiting creativity, and prioritizing certain topics over others, with 66% of respondents citing multiple negative impacts, 18% citing limitations on creativity, 10% citing prioritization of certain topics, 4% citing censorship of sensitive topics, and 4% citing no impact. The high percentage of respondents citing multiple negative impacts suggests that media ownership may be having a

broad and pervasive impact on the content of news reporting. Furthermore, a significant proportion (88%) of respondents admit to avoiding certain topics due to repercussions, with 63% citing government corruption and scandals as a primary concern, 25% citing political opposition or dissent, and 12% citing both government corruption and scandals and topics related to national security. The high percentage of respondents avoiding certain topics due to repercussions is concerning and suggests that media ownership may be contributing to a culture of fear and self-censorship in the media. However, the fact that respondents are willing to admit to avoiding certain topics suggests a level of awareness and concern about the issue. The influence of ownership pressure is also evident, with 86% of respondents reporting instances where they had to align with ownership pressure, particularly during sensitive periods such as elections or political campaigns (64%), government crises or controversies (22%), and economic downturns or financial scandals (14%). The high percentage of respondents reporting instances of ownership pressure is alarming and suggests that media ownership may be exerting undue influence over the content of news reporting. However, the fact that respondents are able to identify specific instances of ownership pressure suggests a level of awareness and concern about the issue.

#### Reasons for media ownership influence

Respondents were asked what factors contribute to media ownership influence on editorial content. According to the data gathered, the contributing factors leading to the influence of media ownership on editorial content are multifaceted, with 56% of respondents citing political power as a primary factor, 28% citing political power and financial gain, 14% citing political power and public interest, and 2% citing public interest alone. This is corroborated by the fact that 90% of respondents believe government political affiliations play a significant role in influencing editorial content. This is a clear indication that political interests are having a significant impact on the media, and that journalists may be facing pressure to report in a way that supports certain political interests or ideologies. This seriously leads to a loss of editorial independence. Economic interests also substantially shape editorial content, according to 60% of respondents. This is a concerning finding, as it suggests that economic interests may be taking precedence over journalistic integrity. The media should prioritize reporting the truth, rather than promoting the interests of advertisers or shareholders. Furthermore, respondents were asked in their opinion what they think is the motivation behind media ownership's influence on editorial content. The view was that they are primarily driven by the desire to promote government ideologies, as reported by 75% of respondents, rather than ensure professional journalistic reporting, as reported by 17%. To mitigate these influences, 28% of respondents suggest strengthening laws to prevent government interference, this is a sensible suggestion, as clear laws and regulations can help to prevent government overreach and protect journalistic independence. 24% propose allowing journalists to self-regulate, 24% recommend encouraging editorial independence, this is important as editorial independence is critical to ensuring that journalists can report freely and without interference. 16% suggest limiting government control over news content,



this is equally a crucial step, as government control over news content can be a major threat to journalistic independence and lastly, 8% suggest implementing protections for journalists who expose unethical practices. This is a vital step, as journalists who expose wrongdoing or unethical practices often face reprisals or backlash. Protecting these journalists is essential to ensuring that the media can continue to hold those in power to account.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In summary, this study highlighted the significant influence media ownership has on editorial decisions and journalistic practice. Survey data reveal compelling evidence that media ownership compromises objectivity, editorial independence, and journalistic autonomy that are foundational to effective journalism. A significant 78% of respondents reported constrained reporting capabilities due to ownership pressure, while political power and economic interests emerged as dominant factors influencing editorial content. Self-censorship, bias, prioritization of stories over others and avoidance of sensitive topics are prevalent, particularly during elections. These findings underscore an urgent need for stakeholders to address the ethical dimensions of media ownership.

Addressing these issues is important for protecting democracy, upholding the media's role as the Fourth Estate, and ensuring the public's access to diverse, uncensored information. Strengthening journalistic autonomy and accountability is vital to mitigate the negative effects of media ownership, fostering a more informed and engaged citizenry.

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