

The Press, Military Coups, and the Nigerian Polity: A Historical Perspective

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ABSTRACT The press in Nigeria has remained one of the most vilified, debated, and acclaimed institutions in recent time. Some have commended it for its tenacity and doggedness especially in the struggle against colonialism and military misrule. Others have condemned it for irresponsible, reckless, and sensational journalism. This paper examined the role of the press in military coups in Nigeria. It found that the press played a strategic and significant role before, during, and after military coups. Before the coup, the press serves as a “barometer” by which the performance of the government of the day is measured. Whenever an incumbent government is receiving negative press coverage or “bashing”, the press is inadvertently preparing the ground for coup plotters to strike. It was discovered that the coup plotters used the negative press coverage as an excuse to take over the government. During the execution of military coups, plotters always seize available broadcast stations to announce the change of government and the policy thrust of the new government. After the coup, the plotters need the press to win legitimacy. The paper also discovered that the press has a significant role to play in the entrenchment of democracy in Nigeria.