



## TRUMP'S FOREIGN MEDIA POLICY AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR PRESS FREEDOM: A STUDY OF VOA HAUSA IN NIGERIA

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### Abstract

This study critically analyses the impact of the Trump administration foreign media policy on press freedom and public diplomacy in Nigeria, with a specific focus on the termination of Voice of America (VOA) Hausa language services. Historically, international broadcasters like VOA have been vital for disseminating information, fostering cultural exchange and promoting democratic ideals, especially in countries like Nigeria transitioning from authoritarian rule. The purpose of this study is to examine the implications of President Trump's foreign media policy on press freedom through a study of VOA Hausa services in Nigeria. This study employs a qualitative case study approach. Driven by an "America First" ideology and a goal to reduce federal spending, the Trump administration's policy shifts led to the dismantling of the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM) and, consequently, the cessation of VOA Hausa services. Utilising the Political Economy of Communication (PEC) and the Media Ownership Theory, this qualitative case study employs secondary data and thematic analysis. It investigates the immediate effects on information access for millions of Hausa-speaking Nigerians, the broader implications for U.S. public diplomacy and soft power, with the consequences for press freedom within Nigeria. Findings revealed that the termination created a significant information vacuum, leaving millions without a trusted news source and exacerbating isolation in conflict-prone regions. This decision severely damaged U.S. credibility and influence, which creates an opening for rival global powers like Russia and China to expand their media presence. The study concludes that the cessation of VOA Hausa services undermined press freedom by eliminating a crucial source of independent, fact-checked news, thereby exposing the fragility of diverse information access to shifts in foreign policy. The study recommends that the U.S. reconsider its policy to restore VOA Hausa services, while Nigeria should pursue diversified information access initiatives and increase support for independent local media to fortify press freedom.

**Keywords:** Press Freedom, Diplomacy, Voice of America (VOA) Hausa, Media Foreign Policy, Information Vacuum.

### 1.0 Introduction

Press freedom is intrinsically linked to the health of a democracy, with the media serving as a crucial non-governmental

watchdog that significantly influences both domestic and foreign affairs within democratic states. Indeed, the media is integral to all stages of foreign policy



formulation, with political leaders keenly considering its national and international implications.

The media has long served as an important instrument of public diplomacy, enabling governments to communicate their policies and perspective to international audience while promoting the principles of press freedom and access to information. As one of the United States international broadcasting service VOA Hausa has played a significant role in providing news and information to millions of Hausa –speaking audiences across West Africa.

In Nigeria, particularly under its democratic dispensation, international media, including the Voice of America (VOA), has profoundly influenced citizens as a primary source of information and education (Williams, 2020).

However, Northern Nigeria, predominantly Hausa-speaking are facing unique developmental, security and socio-economic challenges, has historically relied on various information sources, including traditional media, emerging digital platforms and international broadcasters.

Globalisation, too, has significantly increased the public habit of listening and watching foreign media (Abdulkadir et al., 2024).

More so, Nigeria faced increased scrutiny under Trump's immigration policies, with the US adding Nigeria to a list of countries facing restrictions in January 2020 (Onubogu, Oge, & Robert Daly, 2024). This has strained diplomatic relations and limited opportunities for Nigerians seeking to study, work, or reunite with family in the US.

Against this backdrop, the rise of Donald Trump's foreign media policy and public diplomacy marked a significant departure from traditional U.S. approaches (Drezner, 2019). Characterised by an "America First"

ideology, the administration expressed a clear intent to disrupt established U.S. foreign policy norms, including those governing international broadcasting and media engagement (AFP, 2025). A core objective was to reduce federal spending, often extending to foreign aid and public broadcasting entities like the Voice of America (VOA) and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (Weed, 2021). The impact of his tenure continues to influence both US policy and the global order. Many humanitarian and development programmes sputtered to a halt, and thousands of people working to improve lives, livelihoods, health and freedoms internationally were separated from their jobs (Afolabi et al, 2025).

The termination of Voice of America (VOA) Hausa language services under the Trump administration is thus expected to create an information vacuum, potentially impacting millions, who relied on it for daily news, market information, health advice and insights into global events (Weed, 2021). According to Abdulkadir (2024), some African observers fear that Trump will reduce US interest in the continent, as was the case during his first term.

This study aim to critically analyse the impact of the Trump administration foreign media policy on press freedom and public diplomacy in Nigeria, using the termination of Voice of America (VOA) Hausa language services as a pivotal case study. Specifically, this research will delved into the immediate effects on information access and diversity for millions of Hausa-speaking Nigerians, assess the broader implications for the United States' public diplomacy and soft power projection in a strategically vital African nation and evaluate the consequences for the overall landscape of press freedom within the Nigerian media environment. By doing so, this paper seeks



to offer a nuanced understanding of how shifts in external broadcasting policies can reverberate across global information ecosystems, impacting both local populations and international relations.

More specifically, this research seeks to study the impact of the Trump Administration Foreign Media Policy on Press Freedom and Public Diplomacy in Nigeria: A Case Study of the Termination of Voice of America (VOA) Hausa Language Services. It tries to answer the following questions:

1. Examine the immediate effects of the Trump administration's termination of Voice of America (VOA) Hausa language services on information access and diversity for Nigerian audiences.

2. To analyse the implications of this foreign media policy decision on the United States' public diplomacy efforts and soft power projection in Nigeria.

3. To assess the perceived consequences of the VOA Hausa termination on the landscape of press freedom within the Nigerian media environment.

## **2.0 Review of Related Literatures**

### **2.1 Concept of Press Freedom**

As defined by Reporters without Borders, press freedom signifies the unimpeded ability of journalists to gather and disseminate information, free from any form of physical, psychological, or legal intimidation or harassment.

Therefore, press freedom is about enabling the media to fulfil its essential role in a democracy: to inform the public, facilitate open debate, and act as a check on power, free from intimidation or control.

### **2.2 Concept of Foreign Media Policy**

Foreign policy is fundamentally the pursuit of national interest, a pursuit that may

largely depend upon the perception and ideological orientation of the ruling party.

In the context of the United States, entities such as the Voice of America (VOA) have historically played a prominent role in implementing foreign media policy, aiming to tell America's story around the world. This has been particularly significant in places where information was tightly controlled by regimes seeking to limit the influence of Western democracies (Williams, 2020). The Trump administration foreign media policy, however, represented a notable departure from these conventional approaches, characterised by an "America First" ideology that sought to redefine the parameters of international engagement and expenditure.

### **3.0 Theoretical Framework**

In order to achieve the theoretical objectives of the study, this study employs the Political Economy of Communication (PEC) theory as its primary theoretical lens to analyse the multifaceted impacts of the Trump administration's foreign media policy on press freedom and public diplomacy in Nigeria.

It posits that media systems are not ideologically neutral entities; rather, they are shaped by broader socio-economic and political forces, often serving to reinforce existing power relations or national interests (Oyinloye, 2023). Key tenets of this theory involve investigating the concentration of media ownership, the commodification of information, the pervasive role of the state in media operations and the ideological functions media serve within a given system. Governments and political entities exert control through regulatory policies, funding mechanisms, and legislative frameworks, thereby impacting media content, ownership structures, and freedom of expression (Onuegbu and Anunike,



2024). This scrutiny highlights the potential for media bias or manipulation in media narratives due to political intervention.

A crucial aspect of PEC relevant to this study is the Media Ownership Theory, which forms a sub-component of the broader political economy framework. They assert that the primary focus of a publicly held media corporation is profit generation and objectivity is often pursued as a means to attract readers for advertisers. Thus, the theory posits that news content is intrinsically linked to the economic objectives of the company.

#### **4.0 Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to meticulously investigate the multifaceted impact of the Trump administration foreign media policy on press freedom and public diplomacy in Nigeria, focusing specifically on the termination of Voice of America (VOA) Hausa language services. As advocated by Drezner(2019), this design facilitated an in-depth, holistic examination of this contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context.

For data collection, this research exclusively utilised secondary data. This involved the systematic acquisition and rigorous analysis of pre-existing information, including scholarly literature, official policy documents, and a wide array of international and Nigerian media reports. The analysis of this extensive secondary data set was conducted through thematic analysis.

##### **5.0.1 Effects of the Trump Administration on Termination of VOA Hausa Language Services**

The Trump administration foreign media policy objectives translated into concrete actions that directly impacted Voice of America (VOA) Hausa language services. According to Scott (2025), VOA's status as an international broadcaster with a huge

reach means its apparent dismantling is likely to also have sweeping consequences for media freedom and access to information around the world.

A pivotal moment was an executive order announced on March 15, 2025 (as referenced in various news reports from early 2025), a significant policy directive that aimed to effectively dismantle the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM). This directive was a direct consequence of broader policy shifts and budget cuts under the administration (Weed, 2016; VOA, 2015), driven by an "America First" ideology and a stated intent to reduce federal spending on public broadcasting entities like VOA (Drezner, 2019; AFP, 2025). Following this directive, VOA's leadership announced that all journalists and staff worldwide, including those contributing to the Hausa service, should be placed on administrative leave (AFP, 2025). The direct consequence of these policy shifts and budget cuts was the abrupt cessation of VOA Hausa language services, leading to their regular broadcasts going off-air and leaving millions of listeners without their accustomed news source (Trust TV, 2025; AFP, 2025). This move to shut down the U.S.-funded network was unlawful and unconstitutional (Scott, 2025). The lawsuit points to regulations and laws that protect VOA's editorial independence and safeguard the agency from political meddling.

The discontinuation of VOA Hausa created a substantial information vacuum, particularly impacting millions of Hausa speakers in rural Ghana, Cameroon, and Niger, where access to print media or the internet is often limited (Lawal & Usman, 2021). These populations are now "cut off from news, especially international news," intensifying their isolation in areas already prone to conflict (AFP, 2025). The deep reliance on



VOA Hausa was evident in the confusion among listeners in northern Nigeria, who sometimes interpreted the abrupt silence as a sign of major geopolitical upheaval in the U.S. (AFP, 2025). As Mallam Issah Mairago Gibril Abbas, a regular listener, articulated, the closure has a "devastating impact, particularly for listeners in remote areas who rely on the service for accurate and trustworthy information about global events" (Daily Guide Network, 2025). The termination abruptly ended broadcasts that included vital public health information on HIV and malaria, alongside religious discussions and political debates (Trust TV, 2025; AFP, 2025). For decades, VOA Hausa had been widely perceived as a trusted source of reliable and professional journalism, offering an important alternative in environments where local reporting could be limited or influenced by government or business interests (AFP, 2025). Its cessation not only curtailed direct access for individual listeners but also removed a significant source of syndicated content for local broadcasters, thereby narrowing the overall information landscape available to the public.

Thus, the termination of VOA Hausa services stemmed from a March 2025 executive order to dismantle USAGM, coupled with broader Trump administration policy shifts and budget cuts driven by an "America First" ideology. This led to the abrupt cessation of VOA Hausa broadcasts, placing all journalists on administrative leave. Millions of West African listeners, particularly in rural areas, lost their trusted source of news, public health information, and independent reporting, causing confusion and isolation. The move highlighted VOA Hausa's crucial role as an alternative to potentially biased local media.

### **5.0.2. Implications for U.S. Public Diplomacy Efforts and Soft Power Projection in Nigeria**

As a subtle element of foreign relations, public diplomacy consists of conscious acts of verbal and non-verbal communication with foreign publics by state and non-state actors. It is aimed at influencing international public opinion and projecting countries' positive images in the global context. VOA, including its Hausa service, functions as a tool of public diplomacy for the U.S. government. It aims to influence international public opinion and project a positive image of the U.S., thereby providing independent, fact-based news to foreign publics. For decades, VOA served as a cornerstone of U.S. soft power, broadcasting American values and policies through credible news and cultural programming (VOA, 2015; Premium Times, 2025).

The dismantling of its parent organisation (USAGM) and the abrupt cuts to services like VOA Hausa were widely perceived as a retreat from global engagement and a questioning of the very principles of open information and democracy promotion that the U.S. historically championed (Channels Television, 2025; Reuters Institute, 2025).

### **5.0.3. Perceived Consequences on the Landscape of Press Freedom within the Nigerian Media Environment**

The Trump administration actions against VOA Hausa had significant direct and indirect impacts on press freedom in Nigeria and its apparent dismantling will also have severe consequences for audiences around the world (Scott, 2025). Prior research illuminates the existing pressures on Nigerian press freedom.

Talabi et al. (2023) demonstrated through a survey that media censorship during events like the #EndSARS protest undermines the



objectivity and accuracy of news, forcing the press to operate in an environment of fear. Their study urged Nigerian journalists to uphold their responsibilities and recommended that the government refrain from interfering with media organisations' editorial decisions, fostering a conducive environment for reporting. YRC (2020) further underscored these challenges, noting that in 2019, Nigeria ranked among the top 5 African nations for press oppression and threats, placing it in the top 10 globally for threatened press freedom, exemplified by cases such as Agba Jalingo of Cross River State.

**Information Void and Loss of Independent Voice** The abrupt cessation of VOA Hausa broadcasts created a "painful void" in the Nigerian media landscape, particularly in the northern regions. For millions, who relied on it as a trusted source of independent news, especially concerning sensitive issues like armed conflicts and governmental actions, a critical avenue for information was closed. Organisations such as Reporters without Borders emphasised VOA's vital role in covering stories often underreported or suppressed by local media, highlighting the profound loss of an important independent voice. This policy action also resulted in job losses for VOA Hausa journalists, a decision described as "heartbreaking" by affected staff (Trust TV, 2025; AFP, 2025).

VOA Hausa's crucial role in reporting on areas affected by armed groups in Nigeria and Niger, even in instances of military pressure on journalists, signifies that this vital, often high-risk, coverage is now lost (AFP, 2025). Access to news and information about armed conflicts is crucial for their daily lives and survival.

**Indirect Impact: Exacerbation of Media Suppression Trends:** The reduction of

VOA's presence in Nigeria coincided with a broader trend of media suppression across West Africa, where other international broadcasters like Radio France Internationale (RFI) and BBC Hausa also faced restrictions. The VOA Hausa shutdown occurred at a time, when media freedom in the region was already facing significant challenges and was in decline. This termination further compounded existing pressures, delivering another blow to an already fragile media industry (Trust TV, 2025; AFP, 2025).

**Reactions and Perspectives from Nigerian Media Outlets, Journalists and Relevant Public Figures:** The termination of VOA Hausa services elicited a range of strong reactions from Nigerian media outlets, journalists and the general public. Regular listeners, particularly in northern Nigeria, reacted with widespread confusion and even alarm, when VOA Hausa abruptly went off air. Reports indicated some listeners wondered if there had been a "coup in the U.S.," highlighting their profound reliance on the service for critical, real-time information. Many expressed deep disappointment and a palpable sense of loss, describing it as a "shocking reality" (Channels Television, 2025).

Therefore, the unexpected termination of VOA Hausa broadcasts has had a significant negative impact on Nigerian media. It resulted in the immediate loss of independent news and job losses for journalists, leaving a "painful void." This also means less coverage of crucial stories, particularly conflicts, and is a major setback for Hausa-language journalism. Concerns are also growing that this move could worsen media suppression in West Africa. Listeners are largely confused and disappointed, highlighting VOA Hausa's role as a trusted news source.



## 6.0 Conclusion

This foreign media policy decision significantly undermined the United States' public diplomacy efforts and soft power projection in Nigeria. For decades, VOA served as a cornerstone of U.S. soft power, broadcasting American values and fostering mutual understanding through credible news. The termination was widely perceived as a retreat from global engagement and a questioning of U.S. commitment to open information and democracy promotion, thereby damaging U.S. credibility and diminishing its influence among the Nigerian public. The withdrawal created an information void that rival powers, notably Russia and China, are poised to fill, potentially reshaping the African news ecosystem to their advantage and at the expense of U.S. interests and democratic values. This underscores how shifts in external communication policies, driven by nationalistic ideologies and budget cuts, can severely reverberate through global information ecosystems. Such actions not only impact local populations' access to critical information and diverse viewpoints but also fundamentally alter international relations by ceding influence and diminishing the soft power of the originating nation. This study highlights the enduring importance of independent international broadcasting thereby fostering press freedom and democratic ideals in developing nations like Nigeria, this offers cautionary tale about the far-reaching consequences of withdrawing from such vital global engagements.

## 7. Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are put forth:

1. Policies should be put in place to safeguard the editorial independence of

organisations like VOA and USAGM from political interference, as their credibility is paramount to their effectiveness.

2. Listeners should rely on multiple credible news sources rather than depending on a single media outlet

3. Nigerian media organisations should strive to fill the information gaps left by international broadcasters.

4. International organisations and civil society groups should continue to advocate for press freedom globally and provide support to independent media, especially in vulnerable regions.

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