

Gender, Security, and the Press: Examining the Contributions of Nigerian Female Journalists in Counter-terrorism Narratives

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Abstract

Nigeria is one of the countries facing a high level of insecurity and terrorism and journalists play a crucial role in shaping public understanding of counter-terrorism efforts. Yet, the contributions and experiences of female journalists remain understudied in media and security studies. This study investigates how Nigerian female journalists report, interpret and influence counter-terrorism narratives, focusing on their roles, challenges, and the gendered dimension of their work. Using existing literature, media texts and documented field experiences, the study explores how female journalists contribute to counter terrorism efforts through setting an agenda, human interest framing, and community-level intelligence gathering in their reports. The analysis shows the unique perspectives women bring to security communication, including their emphasis on human interest stories, ethical considerations, and access to vulnerable groups often overlooked by mainstream security reporting. Despite their contributions, Nigerian female journalists face significant challenges such as safety risk, gender bias within the newsroom, limited institutional support, poor payment, and exposure to psychological and physical stress in conflict reporting. This paper argues that recognizing and strengthening the role of female journalists is important for developing inclusive and counter-terrorism narratives in Nigeria. The study contributes to the ongoing research on gender and security by showing how female journalists shape public understanding of terrorism, peacebuilding, and counterterrorism.

Keywords: Gender, Security, Press, Female Journalists, Counter-Terrorism Reportig

Authors Contributions

Dango, E. Salamatu conceived and designed the study, developed the theoretical framework which centered on Framing Theory and conducted the primary data collection. She was responsible for the qualitative content analysis of the selected online media outlets and the initial thematic analysis of the findings. Taye Obateru who is her PhD project supervisor provided critical reviews on the research, provided intellectual and technical insights regarding the gendered dimensions of Nigerian Journalism. He refined the research objectives and finalized the recommendations for media organizations and security institutions.

Introduction

Terrorism remains one of the most complex security challenges facing Nigeria, particularly with the rise of *Boko Haram* and violent extremism over the past decades. The media plays a crucial role in shaping public understanding of such conflicts, influencing policy directions and framing the identities of both perpetrators and victims (McDonald & Mbazie, 2021). Within the media environment, female journalists occupy a unique and often overlooked position. As frontline reporters, editors, producers, and investigative correspondents, they contribute significantly to how terrorism stories are reported, how communities interpret counter-terrorism actions, and how and how gendered perspectives enter national peace and security (Danaan, 2020; Bulus & Obateru, 2014).

Recent research has emphasized the need for inclusive security communication, arguing that women's perspective enriches media narratives by showing community impact, civilian resilience and social dimensions of conflict (Nwangwu & Ezeibe, 2019; Sjoberg & Gentry, 2015). However, most of the existing studies on gender and counter terrorism focus on women as victims, informants, or security personnel, but not as producers of counter terrorism knowledge through journalism (Agbibo, 2021; Veronika, 2019). This creates a gap in understanding how Nigerian female journalists frame terrorism, take risks, and contribute to national security.

Female journalists in Nigeria often work under harsh conditions, facing death threats, harassment, kidnapping, restriction to military bases, patriarchal newsroom structure that limits their ability and editorial authority (UNESCO, 2020; Cook, 2016). Despite these challenges, many continue to report from conflict zones, collaborate with local sources, and expose human rights violations, thereby shaping public debates on counter-terrorism measures. Their work contributes not only to information dissemination but also to early-warning systems, accountability mechanisms, and gender sensitive security narratives (Lawason, 2024).

Given these realities, this study is guided by the following objectives: To examine how Nigerian female journalists construct and report narratives on counter-terrorism issues on selected online media outlet, to assess the challenges, risks and newsroom constraints that affect the ability of female journalists to cover counterterrorism effectively in Nigeria and to identify the level of gender-inclusiveness in counter-terrorism reporting by selected media outlets.

Literature Review

Counter-terrorism refers to coordinated efforts by government, society, security, and civil organizations aimed at preventing, responding to, and mitigating acts of terrorism (Adewale, 2025). In Nigeria, media platforms, especially online media, play significant roles in shaping public understanding of security issues, including terrorism and activities of groups such as boko haram, Fulani herders, and bandits (Agbiboa, 2021). Recent research has shown that the media are not only descriptive but actively construct security stories, influence public perceptions and policy decisions (Fink, Zeiger & Bhulai, 2020).

Digital journalism and multimedia reporting enable journalists to document conflicts, expose human-rights violations, and inform local and international audiences (Chiluwa & Ajiboye, 2022). However, the relationship between gender and security reporting remains underexposed by researchers in the Nigerian context. Recent studies have shown that women in journalism bring unique perspectives to conflict and security reporting due to their lived experiences, access to marginalized communities and groups and the ability to provide nuanced interpretations of insecurity (Cook, 2016; Bulus & Obateru, 2014). Female journalists often frame security stories with emphasis on human rights, community resilience and civilian experience, which are sometimes ignored in traditional security reporting (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2015).

Despite their contributions, female journalists in Nigeria face structural challenges such as newsroom gender bias, limited access to high-risk assignments, safety concerns, societal stereotypes about women's capabilities in security reporting, and harassment (Omi-Ngebu, Nwafor & Elim, 2024). These challenges not only marginalize their professional contributions but also influence the diversity of voices reflected in national security issues.

Research has shown that women in conflict zones are often framed as victims rather than agents of security or contributors to counter-terrorism (Nagarajan, 2018; Kidwai & Dinesh, 2022). Such framings narrow women's diverse roles in security issues and risk, reinforcing gender stereotypes. Women serve as local informants, vigilantes, local mediators, peace builders, logisticians, combatants and security professionals (Nwangwu & Ezeibe, 2019). Female journalists, through their reporting, can challenge dominant frames and promote more inclusive frames in security reporting.

Nigerian female journalists have increasingly taken part in reporting on insurgency, humanitarian crisis, military operations, and community support in counter-terrorism. Their contributions include investigative reporting, human interest reporting, and exposing gender-specific dimensions of terrorism such as sexual violence, recruitment of girls into terrorist

groups such as *Boko Haram*, and the resilience of women in affected communities (Ogundiran, 2022).

However, research has shown that female journalists remain underrepresented in frontline reporting and editorial decision-making (Bulus & Obateru, 2014). This limits the diversity of counter-terrorism reporting and the visibility of women's experiences within conflict zones. Research also reveals that female journalists face risks such as a lack of protective equipment, harassment, and threats which further restrict their participation in high-risk reporting (Veronika, 2019).

Existing research provides valuable insights into terrorism reporting, women's role in conflict and gender-sensitive reporting. However, this study identifies the following gaps in the literature:

1. There is limited research on the role of Nigerian female journalists in counter-terrorism reporting, as most studies broadly examine the role of women in conflict or general media roles.
2. Few empirical studies exist on how female journalists frame or influence counter terrorism in online media.
3. There is also minimal research on how newsroom gender bias affects security reporting in Nigeria.

This study addresses these gaps by examining how female journalists in Nigeria contribute to counter- terrorism efforts and examining newsroom gender bias.

Theoretical Framework

This study is hinged on the Framing Theory. Framing theory explains how the media select aspects of reality and make them more relevant in communication texts. They thereby influence how audiences understand, interpret and evaluate issues (Entman, 1993). According to Entman (1993), framing involves the process of selection and salience through which media narratives define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies. In the context of counter-terrorism reporting, frames shape how security threats are understood, who is presented as an actor, who is framed as a victim, whose voices are heard, and whose voices are marginalized. This is particularly relevant in examining the role of female journalists, whose professional contributions often intersect with gendered expectations within the newsroom and society.

This theory is relevant to this study because journalism is not a neutral reflection of reality, but a structured process influenced by professional routines, institutional norms, and

sociocultural factors (de Vreese, 2015). Female journalists in Nigeria reporting security issues work within an environment traditionally dominated by male journalists. Their framing choices can influence whether counter-terrorism stories are framed around the military, human security, community resilience, or gender inclusion.

This theory allows the study to interrogate how Nigerian female journalists may introduce alternative frames to dominate security frames that were initially stereotypical. For instance, female journalists may use complementary frames such as human-interest frames, civilian experiences, ethical concerns and community efforts in response to terrorism, thereby providing a broader scope of counter-terrorism news stories that go beyond the state and military perspectives (Sjoberg, 2010; Cook, 2016). Such framings can contribute to a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of security.

In applying the framing theory, this study examines how Nigerian female journalists contribute to counter-terrorism efforts through their reporting practices and how these frames influence public perceptions of gender and security. It also provides a strong conceptual foundation for analysing media texts, understanding the work of journalists and assessing in a broader context, gendered media practice in counter-terrorism reporting.

Materials and Methods

This study adopts the qualitative content analysis research method. Content analysis is appropriate for this study because it allows for the systematic examination of media texts in order to identify patterns of representation, themes, and framing (Krippendorff, 2004). The population of the study consists of all online media outlets in Nigeria, while the sampling technique is purposive sampling, which was used to select online news articles published by *The Guardian* and *Premium Times* online newspapers between January and October 2025. These platforms were selected because of their national reach, credibility and consistent reporting of security-related issues. Also, it was a period when security challenges were escalating in Nigeria. Only articles directly related to counter-terrorism reported during the period were included in the sample. The unit of analysis was that the selected online news articles reported and focused on counter terrorism issues.

Furthermore, data were collected using a coding sheet, which served as the primary instrument for data collection. The coding sheet was designed to examine variables such as type of story, dominant frame, sources cited, visibility of women's voices, and the nature of female journalists' contributions to counter-terrorism narratives. Findings were presented in a table with simple descriptive explanations.

The data for this study were analyzed based on the 20 news stories purposively collected from *The Guardian* and *Premium Times* newspaper websites. The items were coded and analysed thematically based on stories related to counter-terrorism. Table one here summarizes the news stories and the gender of the reporter.

Table 1: Article Summary and the Gender of the Journalist

S/ N	DATE	NEWSPAPER	HEADLINE	ARTICLE SUMMARY	REPORTER'S GENDER	FRAME	ARTICLE ID
1	16 th Aug 2025	Premium Times	Nigeria Captures Top globally wanted Ansaru Terrorist behind several atrocities	Nigeria has scored a major counter-terrorism victory with the capture of two of the most wanted leaders of the Al-Qaeda-linked Ansaru group, authorities announced on Saturday	Kabir Yusuf-Male	Counter-terrorism	https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/814582-breaking-nigeria-captures-top-globally-wanted-ansaru-terrorists-behind-several-atrocities.html
2	26 th Dec 2025	Premium Times	Nigerian Security forces foil Christmas Day attacks in Benue and Plateau	Nigerian security forces thwarted separate operations in Benue and Plateau states on Christmas Day, an official says.	Mannesh Mbachii-Male	Counter-terrorism	https://www.premiumtimesng.com/regional/north-central/845645-nigerian-security-forces-foil-christmas-day-attacks-in-benue-plateau.html
3	26 th Dec 2025	Premium Times	US confirms Nigeria's role in Christmas Day bombing of terrorist	The United States carried out air and naval strikes on terrorists' targets in north-western Nigeria.	Kabir Yusuf-Male	State/military authority	https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/845649-us-confirms-nigerias-role-in-christmas-day-bombing-of-terrorists.html
4	25 th Dec 2025	Premium Times	Catholic Church confirms all pupils, staff abducted	The Catholic Diocese of Kontagora has confirmed that all pupils and staff abducted	Mannesh Mbachii-Male	Counter-terrorism	https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/845590-catholic-church-confirms-all-pupils-staff-abducted-from-

			from Niger school have regained freedom	from St. Mary's Catholic Primary and Secondary Schools in Papiri, Agwara Local Government Area of Niger State, have been rescued and reunited with their families, bringing formal closure to the 21 November school attack that shocked the country.			niger-school-have-regained-freedom.html
5	22 nd Dec 202 5	Premiu m Times	Two suspected ISWAP terrorists arrested in Lagos	The suspects—Modu Gana and Ibrahim Dugge—were apprehended by operatives of the State Security Services (SSS).	Yakubu Moham med- male	State/ Militar y action	https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/844820-exclusive-two-suspected-iswap-terrorists-arrested-in-lagos.html
6	29 th Nov 202 5	Premiu m Times	How Military's counter insurgency, flooding endangers African locust trees in Sokoto	African Locust bean, locally called 'Dawadawa', is a proteinous fruit used in spicy food among households in northern Nigeria. However, reports show that the burning of forests by counter-insurgency efforts to eliminate armed bandits who use such	Tunde Omolehi n-male	Human Interes t	https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/839494-how-militarys-counter-insurgency-flooding-endanger-african-locust-trees-in-sokoto.html

- trees as fortresses when launching attacks on communities and flooding, are threatening the livelihoods associated with its fruits and endangering the widespread growth of the trees, and causing biodiversity loss.
- 7 23rd Premium Thirteen Soldiers killed Moham Counte <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/regional/north-east/837858-thirteen-people-abducted-as-soldiers-kill-18-boko-haram-insurgents-in-borno.html>
 Nov Times abducted as soldiers kill 18 Boko haram insurgents in Borno
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- 8 20th Premium UK The UK has Press Policy <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/more-news/726235-uk-donates-training-facility-to-nigerian-army.html>
 Aug Times donates training facilities to Nigerian Army
 202
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 Counter Insurgency (COIN) training facility to the Nigerian Armed Forces, to help enhance the reality of their training and better prepare the force for its future operations.

9	11 th Sep 2025	Premiu m Times	How to end Insurgenc y in Nigeria- Ndume	Borno South Senator, Ali Ndume, has said terrorism, banditry, and insurgency can only be defeated if the military and other security agencies are adequately funded.	Abdulqu dus Ogundap o	Policy	https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/more-news/820425-how-to-end-insurgency-in-nigeria-ndume.html
10	20 th Jan 2025	Premiu m Times	Boko Haram insurgenc y: operation Wetie as final solution	Operation Hadin Kayi should be renamed “operation wetie” as the new module of operation should shift from ground operations to sustained periods of aerial bombardments	Majeed Dahiru- male	Policy	https://www.premiumtimesng.com/opinion/768281-boko-haram-insurgency-operation-wetie-as-final-solution-by-majeed-dahiru.html
11	27 th Nov 2025	The Guardia n	Alaafin seeks integratio n of traditional institutions, native intelligen ce in counter- terrorism	The Alaafin of Oyo, Oba Abimbola Akeem Owoade 1, has called for the urgent integration of traditional institutions and native intelligence into Nigeria’s National Counter- Terrorism Strategy as a necessary component of a holistic approach to address the	Oluyemi Ogunseyi- Male	Policy	https://guardian.ng/news/nigeria/metro/alaafin-seeks-integration-of-traditional-institutions-native-intelligence-in-counter-terrorism/

				country's complex security challenges			
12	27 th Aug 2025	The Guardian	Insecurity : Tinubu to unveil revised national counter-terrorism strategy	The National Coordinator, National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC), Office of the National Security Adviser, Maj.-Gen. Adamu Laka, yesterday, said that President Bola Ahmed Tinubu would officially unveil the revised national counter-terrorism strategy in October this year.	The guardian agency (gender not stated)	Policy	https://guardian.ng/news/insecurity-tinubu-to-unveil-revised-national-counter-terrorism-strategy/
13	14 th Aug 2025	The Guardian	FG unveils grassroots counter-terrorism plan	The Federal Government, through the National Orientation Agency (NOA), yesterday, unveiled its 2025 Counter-Terrorism Strategy, launching a two-week nationwide enlightenment campaign aimed at boosting public awareness on security,	Ernest Nzor and Peace Chime(male & female)	Policy	https://guardian.ng/news/fg-unveils-grassroots-counter-terrorism-plan/

				disaster preparedness, national values, and respect for the country's identity symbols.			
14	3 rd Sep 2025	The Guardian	How to tackle terrorism in Nigeria: Gen Laka	Co-ordinator, National Counter Terrorism Centre (CTC), Maj-Gen. Adamu Laka has said that experience in counter-terrorism operations over the years has shown that a lasting solution lies in addressing the root causes of terrorism and violent extremism	Johnson Eyiaghoro- male	Official security source	https://guardian.ng/news/nigeria/national/how-to-tackle-terrorism-in-nigeria-gen-laka/
15	24 th July 2025	The Guardian	Security experts call for new approach to counter-terrorism as GGA-Nigeria's report shows ISWAP resurgence	Security experts have criticised the Nigerian government's reliance on military/kinetic approaches to tackle insurgency, arguing that a more comprehensive strategy is needed to address the root causes of incessant conflict and attacks the country.	Azeez Kareem- male	Elite security voice	https://guardian.ng/news/security-experts-call-for-new-approach-to-counter-terrorism-as-gga-nigerias-report-shows-iswap-resurgence/

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opinion | https://guardian.ng/saturday-magazine/travel-a-tourism/experts-advocate-deployment-of-drones-to-tackle-terrorism-insecurity/ |

19	8 th	The Guardian	EU pledges €300m to support Nigeria's fight against terrorism	European Union has reaffirmed its commitment to supporting Nigeria's efforts in preventing and countering violent extremism, with a €300 million grant targeted at addressing the root causes of terrorism, especially in the North-East and North-West regions of the country	Odita Sunday - male	Policy	https://guardian.ng/news/eu-pledges-e300m-to-support-nigerias-fight-against-terrorism/
20	13 th	The Guardian	Security concerns: Tinubu, NSA, NIA boss join meeting in Rome	President Bola Tinubu was billed to depart Abuja yesterday for Rome, Italy, to participate in the Aqaba Process Heads of State and Government Meeting, which will focus on the security crisis in West Africa	Terhemb Daka and John Akubo (male)	Security meeting	https://guardian.ng/news/security-concerns-tinubu-nsa-nia-boss-join-meeting-in-rome/

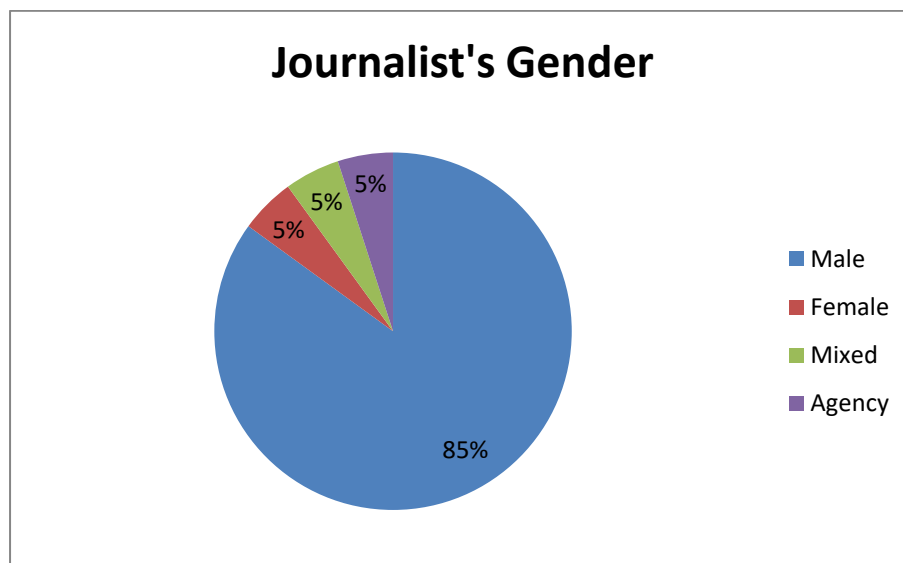
Analysis

This dataset consists of 20 counter-terrorism news articles published between January and December 2025, drawn from two Nigerian online newspapers: Premium Times, 10 articles (50%) and The Guardian, 10 articles (50%). This balanced selection strengthens comparative analysis. The articles focus on terrorism, counter-terrorism operations, security policy, insurgency response and international cooperation against terrorism. Both Newspapers devoted significant attention to counter-terrorism, but with slightly different emphases. While Premium

Times focused more on arrests of terrorists, military successes, environmental and humanitarian consequences of counter-insurgency, The Guardian focused more on policy discussions, expert opinions, government strategies and regional/international corporations.

Both newspapers framed counter-terrorism largely as hard news, emphasizing immediacy, authority, statements and official sources rather than in-depth gendered or human-interest narratives.

Gender Reports



This chart indicates that counter-terrorism reporting in both newspapers is dominated by male reporters which answered research question two about the challenges faced by female journalists in counter-terrorism reporting. They face newsroom biases and limited opportunities to cover issues relating to terrorism and counter-terrorism. Invariably, the dominance of male reporters may shape story selection, sourcing patterns, framing of security narrative and limited visibility of women’s perspectives in counter-terrorism reporting.

Table 2: Frequency of Media Frames

Frame Category	Count	Percentage
Policy	7	32%
Counter-terrorism	5	25
State Military Action	4	20%
Expert/Official Security	2	10%
Human Interest	1	5%
Security Meeting	1	5%
Total	20	100%

Discussion of Findings

The table 2 above shows that the media defines terrorism primarily as a Policy and Military problem. With 80% of the frames focused on policy, military action, or state authority, the “problem” is framed as a matter of state capacity and strategic governance rather than a social or ideological issue. The Frames are heavily dominated by elite voices “Presidents, Generals, Senators, and international bodies). The policy frame often features high-level figures like President Tinubu or the NSA, which suggests that counter-terrorism narratives in Nigeria are largely “top-down” rather than “grassroots-up”. This explains the Framing Theory by Entman, (1993), Goffman, (1974), which suggests that the media does not just tell the audience what to think about, but how to think about it by selecting and emphasizing specific aspects of reality.

The Human Frame is significantly underrepresented (only 5%), appearing only in the story about the destruction of locust bean tree in Sokoto. This suggests that the media pays less attention to the human angle of terrorism, where the ecological and livelihood costs are secondary to the tactical successes of the military.

Women were largely absent from the data collected as key actors, expert sources, security professionals, decision makers even as journalists covering counter-terrorism. Where women appeared, they were mostly victims (abduction, displacement) indirectly referenced and not central to counter-terrorism efforts. Out of the 19 articles where a reporter was identified, 17 were authored by males, 1 was a press release and only 1 included a female co-author. This provides empirical evidence of masculinization of security reporting in Nigeria.

Key findings of this research show that, counter-terrorism reporting is dominated by male reporters. This reflects the general underrepresentation of women in most newsrooms which are male dominated, making only a few of the available to be assigned to cover counter-terrorism issues. There is also the established gender bias in the assignment of beats (Obateru, Alkali & Timloh, 2024) which makes certain beats to be considered unsuitable or dangerous for women. These work against the active participation of female journalists in reporting counter-terrorism. Women journalists are thereby severely under-represented in reporting security issues. The news framing prioritizes national security and policy over gender inclusion. Women’s role in counter-terrorism is largely invisible or peripheral despite their contributions. This study also shows that online newspapers reproduce traditional security reporting with limited gender-sensitive framing.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study examined the role of female journalists in shaping counter-terrorism narratives in Nigerian online newspapers, using selected reports from Premium Times and The Guardian. The findings reveal a significant gender-imbalance in counter-terrorism reporting, with male journalists dominating the authorship. Female journalists were represented minimally, and when present; their contributions were limited to policy or institutional stories rather than frontline security reporting.

The analysis also shows that even the counter-terrorism stories are largely based on military, state, policy perspectives. Women were largely absent both as journalists producing security news and contributors to counter-terrorism. This pattern shows that counter-terrorism reporting is dominated by male journalists, shaped by newsroom routines, beat assignments and perceived risk of covering security issues.

While the study does not claim that female journalists frame security issues differently, it demonstrated that their limited participation restrict diversity and gendered perspectives in the storytelling; including more women journalism in reporting security issues may therefore contribute to a more inclusive reporting on terrorism and counter-terrorism in Nigeria.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Media organizations should include deliberate gender-inclusive policies in beat assignments, ensuring that female journalists are encouraged and protected to cover security and counter-terrorism issues.
2. Media organizations should provide specialized training and safety equipment for female journalists covering high risk beats, this might encourage other female journalists who willingly refused to work in such beats to reconsider their stand.
3. Editors should diversify counter-terrorism narratives that go beyond military, policy and state action to include community resilience, intelligence gathering, peace building and also include women's perspectives and contributions to peace building.
4. Security agencies and counter-terrorism institutions should facilitate access to briefings, data, and field information for female journalists to enhance their participation in security reporting.
5. Further studies should combine content analysis and newsroom interviews to better understand the structural and professional barriers limiting female journalist's involvement in terrorism reporting

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