



Negotiated Journalism under Non-State Power: How Local Journalists Negotiate Press Freedom and Safety in West Madura, Indonesia

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Abstract:

This study explores the strategies local journalists use to respond to coercive influences exerted by non-state actors, including blater, local political cadres, Islamic religious scholars (kiai), and other informal power holders in Madura, Indonesia. Drawing on Giddens' structuration theory, the study examines the interplay among agency, structure, resources, and practical and discursive consciousness to understand how journalists maintain their professional activities under non-state coercion while safeguarding their personal safety. The findings indicate that journalists' responses to coercion extend beyond self-censorship to encompass complex survival strategies, including soft survival, relational defense, and conditional resistance. The study conceptualizes these emerging practices as negotiated journalism, a form of journalistic practice in which the pursuit of truth is continually balanced against personal safety and professional survival. Journalists also negotiate within their media organizations to facilitate these strategies. Three distinct orientations emerge: ethical negotiators, pragmatic survivors, and strategic resisters, illustrating different forms of journalistic agency and adaptation to coercion. In contexts characterized by informal coercion and journalistic precarity, press freedom is therefore understood as an ongoing negotiation between professional autonomy and personal safety. Finally, the study discusses the broader implications for media conditions in Madura and identifies considerations for strengthening journalistic practice across Indonesia.

Keywords: negotiated journalism; non-state actors; local journalism; press freedom; Madura

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INTRODUCTION

From a normative perspective, press freedom presupposes that journalists can investigate and report impartially, objectively, and critically, free from coercion (Chebukhanova and Zimakov 2022; Ivask 2022; Jastramskis 2023; Muñoz-Lalinde 2024). In contemporary newsrooms, however, journalistic autonomy is systematically constrained by complex legal, political, economic, and sociocultural pressures (Clark et al. 2025; Kebede 2024). In transitional, fragile, or conflict-affected settings, media workers may face restrictions that extend beyond formal legislation. The practical boundaries of press freedom are often determined by local patronage systems, community relationships, and coercive pressures imposed by non-state actors (Maares and Hanusch 2022; Moon 2022; Muñoz-Lalinde 2024). Under these circumstances, conventional institutional procedures may be inadequate to protect journalists, particularly when formal constitutional safeguards conflict with deeply embedded local power structures (Joshi et al. 2024; Mhiripiri 2022).

A substantial body of literature on journalism in high-risk environments highlights the unsafe, precarious conditions journalists work in, including threats, intimidation, and economic insecurity (Balderacchi 2024; Hughes and Márquez-Ramírez 2021). Early research primarily addressed state-initiated censorship and repression, whereas more recent evidence points to growing threats from networks operating outside direct state control, such as criminal syndicates, political brokers, and informal elites (Balderacchi 2024; Bustamante and Relly 2021; Joshi 2024). Non-state actors, including local strongmen, religious authorities, and patronage intermediaries, can exert considerable influence over public discourse in peripheral and subnational settings by controlling information flows and establishing implicit boundaries for reporting (Browne 2021; Joshi 2024). These challenges are compounded by economic insecurity, low wages, and unstable employment, which force journalists to weigh their personal safety against risks to their livelihoods (Faris 2023; Slavtcheva-Petkova 2023).

Although existing studies have examined journalists' responses through the lenses of self-censorship, coping strategies, emotional labor, and adaptive safety protocols (Jastramskis 2023; Moon 2022; Stones 2023), these frameworks have limitations. Self-censorship frameworks tend to interpret decisions not to report as submission or professional failure, overlooking active negotiation. Coping frameworks emphasize individual psychological responses and sacrifice rather than bargaining over power, while approaches centered on safety accommodation often prioritize technical solutions and neglect local sociocultural dynamics (Ivask 2022; Selnes 2022; Slavtcheva-

Petkova 2023). Moreover, institutional models of negotiated autonomy focus predominantly on macro-level bargaining between editors and commercial sponsors, paying less attention to interactions in the field (Mesquita 2025; Sullivan 2023). To address this analytical gap, the present study introduces negotiated journalism as a dynamic analytical lens. This concept situates journalistic practice within a relational context between complete submission and overt resistance, in which reporters use discursive and relational resources to negotiate their safety, framing, and scope of reporting without abandoning their professional responsibilities (Faris 2023; Mesquita 2025; Slavtcheva-Petkova 2023).

The study draws on Anthony Giddens' structuration theory, particularly the duality of structure and agency, to explain how negotiated journalism operates (Stones 2023). In Giddens' terms, "structure is not a matter of constraint of the human actor, but is in fact the product of human activity". Structure should therefore not be understood solely as an external constraint on individuals, but also as a set of enabling and constraining rules and resources reproduced through everyday social practices (Giddens 1997, 2007; Lawal 2023; Stones 2023). This understanding of structural influence is also reflected in research on student-athletes, which observes that "student-athletes' mental health is shaped not only by individual symptoms, but also by institutional structures, dual-career demands, and social environments surrounding academic and athletic life" (Inayah et al. 2026). Although examining a different social context, this observation illustrates the relevance of considering institutional structures and social environments alongside individual experiences. In informal subnational contexts, these rules include social norms related to local authority, deference, and power dynamics, as well as formal legal risks such as cyber-defamation. Resources include authoritative and allocative capacities, as well as forms of social capital arising from reciprocal relationships, peer-support networks, and access to moral, instrumental, financial, and digital resources (Björkenfeldt 2025; Masduki and Prastya 2022; Slavtcheva-Petkova 2023). Examining how journalists draw on and reproduce these rules and resources provides a framework for understanding how their practical consciousness informs routine survival practices. Through these practices, journalists navigate and sometimes subtly reshape structural constraints rather than merely submitting to them.

Madura, an island in East Java, Indonesia, offers a particularly relevant setting for examining these processes. Journalistic practice on the island takes place within a sociocultural environment shaped by an informal configuration of authority involving *blater*, *kiai*, and *klebun*.

These actors are embedded in systems of informal rules governing honor, deference, and communal solidarity (Abdullah and Kusaeri 2024; Ida and Widodo 2026; Surokim et al. 2026). Local journalists encounter pressures ranging from direct intimidation and physical threats to symbolic coercion and relational bribery intended to influence news agendas (Faris 2023; Nahria 2025). Under such conditions, everyday news gathering becomes a continuous process of navigating risk. Emerging regional studies suggest that these field-level negotiations are not necessarily signs of professional failure but can represent sophisticated survival strategies that balance truth-telling obligations with physical safety and career continuity (Balderacchi 2024; Browne 2021).

This study makes three principal contributions. First, it provides a detailed empirical account of how local journalists negotiate the influence of powerful non-state actors in a peripheral media environment such as Madura. Second, it contributes to debates on journalism in fragile democracies and hybrid political systems in the Global South by introducing negotiated journalism as an analytical concept. Third, it extends the application of structuration theory by demonstrating how informal non-state power structures interact with the agency of grassroots reporters. The remainder of the paper presents the research methods, discusses the findings, and concludes with theoretical and practical implications.

METHODS

A qualitative research design was adopted to examine how local journalists in Madura respond to pressure from non-state actors and develop strategies for professional survival. A qualitative case study allows for an in-depth examination of journalists' lived experiences, negotiations with local power structures, and adaptive practices. This section outlines the research design, participant selection criteria, data collection and analysis procedures, and ethical safeguards (Creswell 2014; Patricia 2014). Table 1 summarizes the methodological design.

Table 1.

Element	Description
Research Design	Qualitative case study
Research Site	Madura (Bangkalan and Sampang)

Participants	15 local journalists
Sampling	Purposive sampling
Data Collection	Semi-structured in-depth interviews
Analytical Framework	Thematic analysis and structuration theory
Ethical Safeguards	Pseudonymity, encryption, and member checking

Summary of Methodological Design

The participants were drawn from several media outlets, including regional newspapers (*Radar Madura* and *Koran Madura*), digital news platforms (BacaJatim, Lensa Madura, and Lensa Jatim), and television outlets (iNews and TVOne Bangkalan). The sample also included journalists who wished to remain anonymous. Participants had professional experience ranging from four to more than 20 years, allowing the study to incorporate both contemporary and historical perspectives on journalism in Madura. To protect their identities, participants were assigned alphanumeric identifiers, while additional anonymity measures were maintained for those who expressed particular concerns about their safety.

This qualitative case study explores how local journalists manage pressure from non-state actors and incorporate survival strategies into their daily routines. The empirical investigation focused on Bangkalan and Sampang in Madura. The island provides a relevant context for examining press freedom under informal coercion because social, symbolic, and political relations are strongly influenced by the local configuration of authority involving *kiai*, *klebun*, and *blater*.

The study employed a qualitative case study approach to investigate the adaptive mechanisms and emerging survival strategies used by local journalists facing pressure from non-state actors in Madura. This approach was appropriate because negotiated journalism is a situational, relational, and context-dependent phenomenon whose manifestations are closely linked to local power relations. These contextual dimensions would be difficult to capture comprehensively through

quantitative methods alone (Braun and Unger 2023; Creswell and Creswell 2023).

Madura was selected as a single instrumental case to facilitate an in-depth examination of journalistic agency within a distinct sociocultural setting, where informal actors such as *blater*, *kiai*, political intermediaries, and patronage networks exert considerable influence. An external observer's perspective was maintained to support analytical objectivity, although gaining access to media practices was challenging during the initial research stage. This perspective also supported an examination of the interactions and negotiations among different sources of power. Access was negotiated through community-based gatekeepers over approximately five months. Methodological rigor and trustworthiness were strengthened through member checking, which involved validating interpretations against participants' lived experiences.

Purposive sampling was used to select information-rich participants relevant to the study's central research question (Braun and Clarke 2021; Creswell and Creswell 2023; Patricia 2014). The study involved 15 journalists working in print, online, and broadcast media, with fieldwork focused on Bangkalan and Sampang, Madura. The participant selection criteria were as follows:

- 1) Experience practicing journalism in the local Madurese media environment, ranging from novice to experienced journalists.
- 2) Previous experience reporting on sensitive issues, including fraud, local government administration, land disputes, and legal proceedings.
- 3) Direct or indirect experience of external pressure from non-state actors.
- 4) Membership in, or formal affiliation with, recognized journalistic organizations where relevant to professional practice.
- 5) Diversity in professional experience, media outlet, reporting responsibilities, and geographical coverage to obtain varied perspectives.

Recruitment continued until thematic saturation was reached, with additional interviews yielding no substantially new insights.

Table 2.

Informant ID	Gender	Coverage Area (Regencies)	Media Type	Coverage Focus	Experience	Main Pressure Pattern
ID_1	Male	Sampang, Bangkalan	Local online portal	Madura-wide social, political, and policy reporting	7 years	Bribery offers and relational pressure
ID_2	Male	Sampang, Bangkalan	Local newspaper	Bangkalan governance and local politics	4 years	Post-publication intimidation and editorial filtering
ID_3	Male	Sampang, Bangkalan	Local online portal	Bangkalan events, crime, and institutions	5 years	Field obstruction, intimidation, and refusal of bribes
ID_4	Male	Sampang, Bangkalan	Local newspaper network	Bangkalan government, politics, and crime	12 years	Informal threats and reliance on editorial standard operating procedures
ID_5	Female	Sampang, Bangkalan	Local television reporter	Conflict and crime reporting in Bangkalan and Madura	22 years	Community resistance and withdrawal from stories for safety reasons
ID_6	Male	Sampang, Bangkalan	Network digital/print reporter	Bangkalan crime, justice, and regional affairs	24 years	Family rejection, reputational risk, and police-assisted protection
ID_7	Female	Sampang, Bangkalan	Regional online reporter	Bangkalan crime and local politics	5 years	Takedown demands and high daily output targets

ID_8	Female	Sampang, Bangkalan	Local print reporter	Bangkalan village governance and general news	5 years	Intimidation at the office and newsroom consultation
ID_9	Male	Sampang, Bangkalan	Local newspaper reporter	General reporting across Madura	4 years	Gendered vulnerability and patriarchal local pressure
ID_10	Female	Sampang, Bangkalan	Regional online reporter	Online reporting on local governance and social issues	4 years	Takedown demands and high daily output targets
ID_11	Female	Sampang, Bangkalan	Local print reporter	Village governance and general local reporting	5 years	Intimidation at the office and newsroom consultation
ID_12	Female	Sampang, Bangkalan	Local online reporter	General reporting across Madura and local affairs	4 years	Gendered vulnerability and patriarchal local pressure
ID_13	Male	Sampang, Bangkalan	Regional online reporter	Regional online news and political reporting	5 years	Informal threats and bribery offers
ID_14	Male	Sampang, Bangkalan	Local print reporter	Local governance, politics, and village affairs	6 years	Post-publication intimidation and informal pressure
ID_15	Male	Sampang, Bangkalan	Network digital/print reporter	Politics, local government, and regional conflict	10 years	Verbal threats, <i>blater</i> intimidation, and editorial filtering

Research Informants

The empirical data were obtained through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 15

journalists. These interviews explored participants' experiences of intimidation, negotiation practices, ethical dilemmas, coping strategies, and perceptions of editorial independence under pressure. Given the sensitivity of the subject, interviews were conducted using secure communication methods agreed upon by the participants, including face-to-face meetings and encrypted communication. With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and anonymized before analysis. The interview guide covered four main themes:

- 1) Pressures encountered from non-state actors.
- 2) Strategies for responding to pressure and maintaining resilience.
- 3) Ethical dilemmas and adaptive professional practices.
- 4) Perceptions of professional effectiveness, safety, and press freedom.

Procedural Framework for Data Analysis

The interview data were analyzed thematically, following Braun and Clarke (2006). This approach combined inductive coding of emerging patterns with a theoretically informed interpretive framework. The analysis comprised the following stages:

- 1) Familiarization and immersion in the data: Transcripts were read repeatedly to develop a detailed understanding of participants' accounts and their nuances.
- 2) Initial coding of prominent phenomena: Open coding was used to identify recurring patterns related to perceived threats, negotiation strategies, protective measures, and acts of resistance.
- 3) Consolidation of codes into themes: Preliminary codes were synthesized into four analytical themes:
 - a) Constructions of informal sociopolitical threats.
 - b) Typologies of survival strategies.
 - c) Configurations of journalistic agency.
 - d) Conceptualizations of negotiated journalism.

Theoretical Interpretation and Structuration Framework

The identified themes were critically examined and situated within Anthony Giddens' structuration theory, particularly its account of agency, structure, and the duality of structure. All coding was conducted manually, allowing for iterative comparisons across participants' interview accounts.

Ethical Imperatives and Assurance of Trustworthiness

Given the sensitivity of intimidation and covert power relations, the study incorporated explicit ethical safeguards. Participants' confidentiality was protected through the use of pseudonyms or alphanumeric codes, the omission of potentially identifying contextual details, and the removal of identifying information from interview transcripts. The trustworthiness of the findings was supported by several procedures:

- 1) Member checking with selected participants to obtain feedback on emerging themes.
- 2) Cross-case analysis to compare themes across interview accounts.
- 3) Thick description to support the transferability of findings to other research contexts.
- 4) Ongoing reflexive consideration of the researcher's position during coding and interpretation. All raw interview data and transcripts were stored in password-protected electronic files to reduce the risk of unauthorized access

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The interview findings indicate that local journalists in Madura face multidimensional constraints, including formal legal barriers, informal sociopolitical pressures, and economic instability. Participants described varied adaptive responses, ranging from pragmatic accommodation to conditional noncompliance. Table 3 summarizes the principal analytical categories identified through the thematic analysis of interview data.

Table 3.

Dimension	Subthemes	Illustrative Evidence	Interpretive Meaning
Formal Legal Pressures	Threat of criminalization under UU ITE; defamation risk; legal uncertainty	Journalists reported concerns about legal complaints, strategic delays in publication, and reliance on “cover both sides” as legal protection.	Formal law functions as a constraining structure that encourages cautious reporting.
Informal Sociopolitical Threats	Intimidation by <i>blater</i> , village elites, contractors, and religious figures (<i>kiai</i>)	Verbal threats, intimidation involving <i>celurit</i> , coercive negotiations, and threats against family members	Informal power often poses a more immediate threat than state law.
Soft Survival Tactics	Euphemistic language, delayed publication, cautious framing, tactical omission	Journalists softened their language, postponed publication, or adjusted their framing to reduce the risk of escalating conflict.	Survival often depends on discursive adaptation rather than direct confrontation.
Relational Survival Tactics	Mediation, alliance-building, solidarity networks	Journalists sought protection through rival strongmen, police officers, editors, or fellow journalists.	Social relationships function as protective resources under threat.
Protective Resistance	Collective publication, sharing information with national media, documenting	Some journalists collaborated on publication or referred cases to wider networks.	Resistance is often indirect, collective, and conditional.

threats			
Economic Pressures	Dependence on local advertising, <i>amplop</i> culture, low salaries	Informants associated economic precarity with ethical dilemmas and compromised autonomy.	Safety and professional independence are closely linked to economic precarity in the media.
Typologies of Agency	Ethical negotiators; pragmatic survivors; strategic resisters	Journalists adopted different approaches to balancing truth-telling, safety, and resistance.	Agency takes differentiated forms rather than fitting a simple resistance–submission binary.
Reconceptualizing Press Freedom	Press freedom as negotiated safety.	Participants understood freedom as the ability to communicate necessary truths while remaining safe.	Press freedom is practiced through situational negotiation rather than absolute autonomy.

Summary of Legal Constraints, Sociopolitical Pressures, and Local Journalistic Responses in Madura.

The Dual Nature of Everyday Structural Threats

The interviews provide evidence that local journalists in Madura face constraints arising not only from formal legal frameworks, including the Information and Electronic Transactions Law (UU ITE), but also from informal coercive power. These formal and informal mechanisms interact to create a complex structural environment. Interviewees consistently indicated that pressure from *blater* (locally influential strongmen), village officials, contractors, religious leaders, and intermediaries often posed a more immediate threat than formal state mechanisms. Such pressure included threats communicated by telephone, direct physical harassment, intimidation involving a *celurit* (a traditional sickle), coercive negotiations, and offers of material or symbolic benefits. These practices could force journalists to choose between complying with powerful actors and exposing themselves to potential harm. One participant described this predicament as follows: “*We were presented with a stark dichotomy: an envelope or death*” (ID_4). Another stated, “*No journalistic endeavor is worth the forfeiture of one's life*” (ID_1).

These accounts suggest that the threats experienced by journalists are not isolated incidents

but manifestations of enduring structural conditions affecting journalism. From the perspective of structuration theory, persistent threats reflect structures of domination that restrict professional autonomy and narrow the opportunities for exercising agency. These findings extend the literature on journalist safety, which has often emphasized state-induced harassment or collective violence, by highlighting how informal forms of authority and weaknesses in formal legal protection operate as interconnected and mutually reinforcing constraints.

Negotiated Journalism as a Stratified Repertoire of Survival Tactics

A central finding from the interviews is that journalists facing threats do not invariably resort to self-censorship as their initial response. Instead, they actively employ a complex, layered, and interdependent repertoire of survival strategies. The first layer consists of soft survival tactics, including the careful use of less confrontational language when reporting uncomfortable truths, postponing publication until tensions subside, using the “covering both sides” approach as a protective measure, and framing controversial issues cautiously. Many participants emphasized that moderating their reporting language did not necessarily constitute an abandonment of journalistic principles. Rather, it was perceived as a necessary adaptation to danger that enabled them to continue reporting.

The second layer consists of relational survival tactics, which involve cultivating and mobilizing interpersonal relationships and protective networks. These practices include seeking mediation through individuals trusted by both sides of a dispute, obtaining protection from influential figures in rival groups, developing alliances with police officers or media managers, and strengthening solidarity with fellow journalists. One participant explained: *“If we stand with blater (a) in our conflict with him, often we have needed another blater (b) to support us”* (ID_4). This account illustrates the importance of social relationships as resources for protection during conflicts.

The third, more proactive layer involves protective resistance tactics, including coordinating coverage across multiple outlets to avoid exposing individual reporters, strategically sharing information with larger media organizations, filing formal police reports about intimidation, and documenting threats. Although these practices constitute forms of resistance, they remain pragmatic and attentive to risk, avoiding direct physical confrontation. The findings challenge a binary understanding of journalistic survival as either submission or defiance. Instead, survival is more accurately conceptualized as negotiated adaptation, enacted through discursive, relational, and

protective practices. Accordingly, responses conventionally described as self-censorship should not be understood solely as the silencing effects of coercion; they can also form part of negotiated journalism.

Differentiated Typologies of Agency Under Conditions of Pressure

The interviews revealed different expressions of journalistic agency under pressure. Analysis of the interview transcripts identified three ideal-type orientations:

Ethical Negotiators: Journalists who use tactical negotiation to manage external pressures while maintaining their professional values and ethical principles.

Pragmatic Survivors: Journalists who prioritize personal security and safety when faced with heightened threats and risks.

Strategic Resisters: Journalists who continue to engage in critical reporting through indirect, negotiated, collaborative, nonconfrontational, and risk-conscious approaches.

These typologies suggest that journalistic agency cannot be reduced to a simple choice between opposition and conformity. Instead, it encompasses a spectrum of adaptive and strategic practices. Giddens' structuration perspective (Giddens, 1984) offers a useful framework for interpreting these patterns through the duality of structure: human actors are constrained by social structures while also participating, sometimes subtly or indirectly, in their production and reproduction.

Conceptualizing Press Freedom as Contingent Safety Through Negotiation

A significant finding is that participants understood press freedom not merely as an abstract liberal ideal but as a contingent, context-dependent condition that requires ongoing negotiation. In the daily experiences of local journalists, press freedom was defined less by the unrestricted ability to publish and more by the capacity to communicate important truths without placing their lives, livelihoods, families, or personal relationships at unacceptable risk. Their accounts suggest that, within traditional local communities, press freedom may be experienced as negotiated security rather than solely as a formally recognized right.

This interpretation does not reject liberal conceptions of press freedom. Rather, it shows the limitations of these conceptions in settings where traditional authority, physical threats, and

economic vulnerability profoundly shape journalistic practice. The study contributes to scholarship on journalism in the Global South by highlighting personal safety as a central factor informing local journalists' experiences and perceptions of press freedom, alongside editorial independence. Similar dynamics can be observed in other Global South contexts where informal power structures remain influential and legal protections are unreliable. In such circumstances, journalists rely not only on statutory rights and institutional safeguards but also on professional alliances and social networks as forms of social capital that help protect them while performing their duties.

The space for journalistic freedom remains constrained in settings where local strongmen, informal elites, or political intermediaries exert substantial influence over public discourse. As long as journalists must weigh the communication of important truths against threats to their personal safety, press freedom remains contingent on their ability to navigate these competing pressures. Such tensions have historical parallels with conditions experienced in the 1970s and 1980s.

The Interplay of Economic Precarity, Ethical Compromise, and Structural Vulnerability

Another recurring theme in the interviews concerns how economic precarity increases journalists' vulnerability. Participants frequently linked declining commercial advertising opportunities, growing dependence on politically or ideologically aligned advertising revenue, persistently low wages, and the continued prevalence of *amplop* (envelope) culture to the ethical dilemmas they encounter in their daily work. Although individual ethical responsibility remains important, many participants understood these dilemmas as consequences of deeper systemic problems rooted in the economic fragility of local media organizations.

Some actions commonly interpreted as corruption may therefore also be understood, without necessarily being justified, as strategic behavioral adaptations to systemic constraints. Ethical compromises in environments characterized by persistent economic instability can arise not only from individual misconduct but also from the combined effects of institutional precarity, limited resources, and unequal power relations. These findings demonstrate a relationship between the economic instability of media organizations and the insecurity experienced by journalists. More broadly, this interaction between material and ethical precarity reflects challenges faced by newsrooms in other developing media environments, where informal remuneration and patronage arrangements may become mechanisms of institutional and individual survival. Ethical compromises should therefore be examined in relation to systemic constraints rather than attributed

exclusively to individual failings.

Towards the Formulation of a Conceptual Model for Negotiated Journalism

The findings support a broader conceptualization of negotiated journalism in which journalists actively respond to the conditions of their work and develop complex interpersonal relationships in the face of persistent threats, rather than relying exclusively on fixed professional routines. As illustrated in Figure 1, the proposed model portrays negotiated journalism as a dynamic process in which journalists simultaneously accommodate and resist the pressures they encounter. Their responses shift according to assessments of situational risk, the influence of different actors, and considerations related to journalistic responsibility.

Rather than applying a single strategy consistently, journalists adjust their reporting practices to changing legal requirements, social expectations, and political pressures. The key finding is that negotiated journalism should be understood not merely as a reaction aimed at survival but as a strategic practice through which journalists preserve a degree of professional agency within existing constraints. It does not necessarily imply abandoning journalistic standards; instead, it entails adapting the application of those standards to particular circumstances. The interviews indicate that risk avoidance, symbolic bargaining, and selective withdrawal from confrontation form an integrated framework of adaptation rather than a set of unrelated responses.

Figure 1.



Model of Negotiated Journalism in Madura

Integrating the empirical observations with structuration theory allows the model to be understood not merely as a simple cycle but as a framework incorporating both external and internal influences and their outcomes. As the model indicates, journalists respond to their surrounding conditions by drawing on social and institutional resources to develop and exercise different forms of agency.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates how journalists in Madura operate under overlapping pressures arising from legal risks, economic instability, and informal power structures, particularly the local configuration of authority involving *kiai*, *klebun*, and *blater*. Rather than automatically resorting to self-censorship, journalists adopt adaptive survival strategies, including moderating their language, delaying publication, seeking peer support, and negotiating relationships with competing local elites.

Empirically, journalistic responses to these pressures can be organized into three orientations: (1) ethical negotiators, who seek to maintain professional ethics through negotiation; (2) pragmatic survivors, who prioritize physical and financial security; and (3) strategic resisters, who employ indirect and collective forms of resistance. These orientations demonstrate that journalistic agency takes multiple forms in environments characterized by coercion.

Theoretically, the study applies and extends Giddens' structuration theory to journalism in non-Western subnational contexts shaped by informal coercion. It shows how structures simultaneously constrain and enable journalistic action through access to allocative and authoritative resources. It also highlights the interplay between discursive consciousness, reflected in journalists' articulated ethical commitments, and practical consciousness, reflected in tacit, routine strategies used to navigate pressure. The study further develops the concept of negotiated journalism by reconceptualizing press freedom as a condition of relative safety that is continually reproduced through negotiation among journalists and competing sources of local power while they seek to serve the public interest.

The findings have implications for journalist protection and media governance. They suggest the need to complement conventional legal safeguards with locally grounded interventions addressing informal non-state power. Press freedom organizations, press councils, newsroom

managers, and other stakeholders should also address economic insecurity and the safety risks faced by regional journalists operating under informal coercive pressures.

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Declaration of Generative AI

During the preparation of this work, the authors used Go Text and Grammarly to translate and enhance the manuscript's readability and language. The authors assume full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the content of this manuscript.

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